The Emergence of Political Pluralism in Romania

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This paper puts forward arguments supporting the idea that the essence of political evolution in Romania since 1989 has been the same as in other former communist countries of East Central Europe. In spite of some specific features, of some delays, and of difficulties, it is a process of democratization. As political practice has revealed, pluralism is first associated here with the establishment of a multi-party system and also with the proliferation of different non-party groups. The most important moments of the pluralization process in Romania are evoked, focusing on the elections and the adoption of the new Constitution.

After the collapse of communism in East Central Europe, one of the most difficult problems for political scientists has been what is called “the reunification of language” (Dahrendorf, 1990, p.13). This reunification also implies a revaluation and revitalization of some basic concepts, according to the on-going developments in a dramatically changing area of the world. One of these concepts is that of pluralism—more specifically, of political pluralism—a concept with a very complex history in this century, especially in the USA.

As is well-known, after its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, the theory of pluralism was faced with many controversies and, consequently, with many revaluations. Even Dahl (1982), one of the most influential scholars of pluralism, has focused on what he called the “dilemmas of pluralist democracy:” uniformity versus diversity, centralization versus decentralization, concentration versus dispersion of power, and so on. In the last decade many authors have underlined several different meanings of pluralism. Shafritz (1993, pp. 354–355), for instance, has given a complex definition of pluralism, distinguishing three meanings: (1) cultural diversity; (2) any political system in which there are multiple centers of legitimate power and authority (that is—as the author later defines political pluralism—a “governing arrangement with a separation of powers, such as in the United States”); (3) a theory of government “that attempts to reaffirm the democratic character of society by asserting that open, multiple, competing and responsive groups preserve traditional democratic values in a mass industrial state.” Indeed, in recent years pluralism has been replaced by “pluralisms,” comparisons between American and European pluralism as well as parallel approaches to political, economic, societal,
ethnic, or religious pluralism have been made by specialists in different fields, and various forms of political pluralism have been described.

In spite of the theoretical controversies, pluralism is highly regarded in the ex-communist countries since it appears to be the alternative to the totalitarian or authoritarian systems, and the authentic model of contemporary democracy. Because an up-to-date theory of pluralism, adequate to the new realities of East Central Europe, has not yet been elaborated, the political pluralization process is primarily understood here as the dispersion of power from a system with a single center of decision-making to one in which there are multiple centers of legitimate power. In this process the institutionalization of various forms of voluntary association is considered to be essential: to the extent to which they effectively represent people’s specific interests and aspirations these groups appear to be the means of restoring civil society. As studies on different countries in this area have revealed, pluralism is first associated with the establishment of the multi-party system (see the special issue of this journal “The Emergence of Pluralism in East Central Europe,” Vol. 26, No. 4, December, 1993).

Although Romania has had some features specific to itself in its evolution since 1989, in essence the process has been the same as that of the other former communist countries. They are all in the throes of democratization.

In Romania the experience of an incipient democratic life goes as far back as the second half of the last century, when the first Romanian Constitution was adopted and two major parties crystallized. In the interwar period, after the Great Union of 1918, a new Constitution was adopted and over 50 parties were active. Although some deficiencies were apparent in the transfer of institutions from Western democracy to a peasant country (for more details see Jowitt, 1978, p. I), this so-called “mimic democracy” nevertheless appears retrospectively as “the lesser evil” in comparison with the dictatorships that followed it, and in such a polity “there is, or can be, a lot of democracy” (Dogan, 1987, p. 369). In 1938, an authoritarian regime was installed and the freedom of political association was restricted—as also happened in other countries in the region in the time immediately preceding the Second World War.

After the war, Romania was included in the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence and, consequently, political parties—other than the communist party—were banned and their leaders were imprisoned or went into exile.

In the Ceausescu era, although a great number of non-party organizations existed in Romania—trade unions, organizations of women, of young people, as well as professional, scientific or cultural associations and so on—these did not amount to pluralism because all of them followed the same ideology and the single party system did not accept any kind of institutionalized opposition.

This experience over the last 50 years was the main reason why Romanian society was not prepared—from the organizational point of view—for the revolutionary process of 1989, although people had a great wish for change. As a result, a real institutional vacuum and a crisis of authority followed the overthrow of the dictatorship. It was, and still is, very difficult to revitalize the democratic traditions after a long period of interruption and to adapt them to the new features of more developed contemporary democracies.

What is happening now in Romania is a very complex and difficult process of transition from a hypercentralized system to a democratic one with a free market economy. The transition is slow and rather painful for most people. In 1993, the private sector contributed between 15 and 25 per cent to the gross domestic product and to more than 40 per cent of the retail sales. In addition, some 80 per
cent of the arable land had been returned to private farmers. At the same time, the rate of unemployment was around 10 per cent and the rate of inflation was approximately 300 per cent (Adevarul, February 5–6, 1994).

Against this background, an analysis will be made of the most important moments in the development of an institutional framework for political pluralism in post-revolutionary Romania. An attempt will be made to present both the successes and the obstacles that this on-going process is facing.

The First Steps toward Pluralism

The Romanian revolution differed in some respects from the democratic openings in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. In other countries in the region, the process of political change began years ago and there were long-standing anti-communist groups such as Solidarity in Poland or Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. Although Ceausescu pursued a flexible foreign policy line, he maintained a harsh domestic policy, establishing a high degree of social control. Therefore, no significant opposition was possible, although there were some cases of dissent from cultural or political personalities and some workers' strikes that were rapidly stifled. As a result, the revolutionary change of 1989 took place suddenly and the initial period was characterized by tension and violence. Step-by-step, the new structures and institutions on the way to democratic government were established, but the process is on-going.

On December 22, 1989, the Council of the National Salvation Front (CFSN) was formed and became the transitional government. One of its first decree-laws (number 8/1989) concerned the registration and functioning of political parties and public organizations. It declared a freedom of organization and established very unrestricted conditions in this respect. For example, only 251 members are necessary for an organization to be registered as a party. Political parties formed rapidly, both new ones and those that considered themselves as continuations of historic Romanian parties.

In March, 1990, an Electoral Law was adopted, which functioned both as a "mini-Constitution," setting out the form of government for post-revolutionary Romania, and a detailed set of electoral procedures for electing the president and a bicameral parliament. This law explicitly specified that the Romanian government works on the basis of a pluralist democratic system.

From the pluralist point of view the most significant aspect of the electoral campaign was the proliferation of parties. It appears to be a general feature of post-dictatorship periods, and it is common to ex-communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe as a reaction against the one-party system. In Romania, the revival of the multi-party tradition was favored by the unrestrictive provisions mentioned above and by the provision referring to the public financing of the electoral campaign. Thus 75 political parties (including ethnic minority organizations) submitted petitions for candidacy.

But another characteristic feature of the post-dictatorship period has been the contradiction between the proliferation of parties and the resistance of the population to party affiliation. A month before the May elections, a poll revealed that only 8 per cent of the electoral body was affiliated with a party (Datculescu and Liepelt, 1991, p. 21). Of course, it is necessary to emphasize that this does not mean a lack of interest in political life. On the contrary, Romanians were excessively politicized. According to another poll from the same period, about 96 per cent of the population participated in politics, but that activity took the particular
form of discussions on political themes and reading of newspapers (Margineanu, 1991).

The 20th May 1990 Elections
As was expected, the people’s need to express their freedom induced a very large turnout: 86 per cent.

As in other Eastern and Central European countries, fewer than ten parties proved themselves to be competitive: only nine parties gained more than 1 per cent of the votes. The main winner was the National Salvation Front (FSN), a heterogeneous group, whose initially declared goal was to join people having various political ideologies in order to manage the transition to democracy; later on, when different political parties had been formed, FSN considered itself a social-democratic “movement.” Ion Iliescu, its candidate for president, gained 85 per cent of the vote and the Front won 67.0 per cent of the vote for the Senate and 66.3 per cent of the vote for the Assembly of Deputies. In second place was the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR), the largest ethnic national organization, which received 7.2 per cent of the vote for both the Senate and Assembly, a percentage corresponding to the share of this ethnic group in the Romanian population. The next was the National Liberal Party (PNL), one of the historic parties that consider themselves to be a continuation of the Romanian parties formed in the 19th century; the Liberal Party received 7.6 per cent of the vote for the Senate and 6.4 per cent of the vote for the Assembly. The other parties gained less than 3 per cent (for the whole results of the elections, see Datculescu and Liepelt, 1991, p. 111). These elections led to what Smith (1983, p. 81) has called the “imbalanced” type of party system: one party is in a commanding position and a large gap stands between it and the second party.

How can this outcome be explained? The results of the vote were contested by some parties, but there was no significant proof of this contestation. The International Delegation to the Romanian Elections (comprised of 60 members from 20 nations) stated: “Our teams did note instances of irregularities, but we did not observe systematic electoral fraud” (International Delegation Report, 1991).

There were, perhaps, two main explanations of the result. First, the period between the overthrow of the dictatorship and the elections was not long enough for the crystallization of different political ideologies and of significant trends in political life. Early elections may nevertheless have been necessary because of the immediate need to establish a legitimate power. Second, at the beginning of the transition period, people preferred a moderate change, associated with social protection, against the inevitable risks—such as the program the National Salvation Front had supported.

It should be emphasized that the May, 1990, elections were the first multi-party elections since the 1940s and thus they represented a departure from the totalitarian system. But they were only a beginning step in the process of establishing a truly democratic political system in Romania.

The New Constitution
After 1989, the East Central European countries were faced with a “Constitution dilemma” (Curry, 1993, p. 446): whether to begin the transition by adopting a new Constitution, or instead to give priority to the problems of policy-making, working
on the basis of the old Constitution modified by some amendments. Only Bulgaria and Romania chose the first way.

It is very hard to appreciate what is the best temporal sequence of political, economic, and social changes in the process of democratization. If we take into account the speed of the reform and the economic results of the two countries mentioned above, we could conclude that their choice was not the most efficient. But, at least in the case of Romania, given the characteristics of the hyper-centralized communist rule and those of the violent revolution, it would have been quite impossible to imagine a transition toward democracy under a Constitution constructed on the basis of the leading role of the communist party. Thus, a consensus by various political forces was achieved about the need for an early Constitution, in spite of some serious ideological disputes about the content of this document.

In his Reflections on the Revolution in Europe, Dahrendorf (1990) seemed to concur with the necessity of new Constitutions: “At the political level the temptation is great to begin with constitutional change. Nor is this just a temptation; the need is clear if the monopoly is to be broken.” To Dahrendorf (1990, pp. 81, 86) this change means “to find a way out of the monopoly of the party and all subordinate monopolies too.”

The new Romanian Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly (both houses of the Parliament) in November, 1991, and entered into force pursuant to its approval by the national referendum of December, 1991, when more than 77 per cent of the participants approved it.

Let us see now those provisions of the Constitution that are significant for the pluralist view (The Constitution of Romania, 1991). A first point to note is the stipulation in Article 2 that political pluralism is among the “supreme values” guaranteed by Romania. Similarly, Article 248 includes political pluralism among a handful of constitutional provisions that shall not be subject to revision.

What does political pluralism mean in terms of the Romanian Constitution? Article 8 is entitled “Pluralism and Political Parties” and stipulates that “pluralism in the Romanian society is a condition and safeguard of Constitutional democracy.” Related to this is Article 9, which refers to the trade unions’ role, specifying their contribution to the defence and support of the professional, economic, and social rights and interests of employees. This connection is also reflected in Article 37 which makes “right of association” one of the fundamental rights and provides that citizens may freely associate in political parties, trade unions, and other forms of association. By the same Article, the first reason to consider a party or an organization unconstitutional is its activity against political pluralism.

The mechanism of political pluralism described in this Constitution could be interpreted in terms of what Americans call “checks and balances,” as a way of limiting the power of every branch of the government. It is true that the Constitution of Romania does not specifically provide for the separation of powers (neither does the United States Constitution), but the specific prerogatives and interrelations of the so-called “public authorities” (Title III)—parliament, president, government, judicial authority—are stated. These interrelations define what is known as the “semi-presidential” system of government, similar, in many respects, to the French system.

It is worthwhile underlining some of the stipulations that, through checks and balances, appear to be significant in preventing the concentration of power.

First of all, let us consider the relations between parliament and the president. Parliament (“the sole legislative authority”) may decide to suspend the president.
from office "In case of having committed grave acts infringing upon Constitutional provisions" (Article 95). On the other hand, the president (elected for a four year term—twice at the most) may dissolve parliament only "if no vote of confidence has been obtained to form a government within 60 days after the first request was made, and only after rejection of at least two requests for investiture" (Article 89). And it should be noted that the president may initiate a referendum only after consultation with parliament (Article 90).

Second, about the relations of the government with the president and parliament. The president shall designate a candidate to the office of prime minister, after consulting with the party that won the absolute majority in parliament, or, if no party obtained a majority, with various parties; the candidate needs a vote of confidence from parliament on the program and on the complete list of the government (Article 102). The government is politically responsible for its entire activity only before parliament (Article 108). Parliament may withdraw the confidence given to the government, by a motion of censure (Article 112).

Also notable as an important aspect of the separation of powers and of the checks and balances is the provision that judges are independent and irremovable (Article 123, 124). Moreover, the independence of the judiciary shall not be subject to revision (Article 148).

This "horizontal" division of power among the branches of national government is associated with a "vertical" division: the Constitution stipulates local autonomy and the decentralization of public services as basic principles of the local public administration (Article 119).

Political pluralism would be meaningless in the absence of the economic pluralism specific to a decentralized economy. Thus, it is very significant that the Constitution stipulates: "Romania's economy is a free market economy" (Article 134). The same Article specifies that the state must secure free trade, a protection of loyal competition, as well as a favorable framework for stimulating and valuing every factor of production. At the same time, the right of private property—which is protected—is included among the fundamental rights (Article 41).

Also important from the pluralist point of view are the provisions regarding ethnic minorities. The "right to identity" is stipulated: "The State recognizes and guarantees the right of persons belonging to national minorities, to the preservation, development and expression of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity" (Article 6). These persons have the right to learn in their mother tongue (Article 32) and the right to an interpreter in the court (Article 127). It is worth stressing the provision that stipulates: "Organizations of citizens belonging to national minorities, which fail to obtain the number of votes for representation in Parliament, have the right to one Deputy seat each, under the terms of the electoral law" (Article 59).

For a pluralist society the provisions referring to two other fundamental rights are also very significant: "freedom of conscience"—focused on religious liberty and toleration (Article 29); and "freedom of expression"—specifying the prohibition of any censorship (Article 30).

Having presented the stipulations relevant to the issue of pluralism, mention should be made of some arguments that have been made against the new Romanian Constitution, as well as of the debates which have occurred regarding the interpretation of its content. For instance, the absence of an explicit articulation of the separation of powers provoked strong confrontations between politicians and between specialists as well. Furthermore, the government reshuffles of 1993 and 1994, which were done by the president after consultations with different
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parties but without express consultation with parliament, caused some debates about the constitutionality of these changes.

Nevertheless, by adopting the new Constitution, the way to a “constitutional pluralist state” was opened for Romania. According to Ghita Ionescu (The British political scientist of Romanian origin), this concept means that the function of the state, established by the Constitution, is to guarantee the free pluralist activity of the society (Ionescu, 1972).

It is very important, though, not to overvalue the role of the new Constitution in the process of democratization. As is well-known, although the Constitutions of the former communist countries (including that of Romania) had many positive provisions, their practical application was often in contradiction with real democracy. It is worth quoting Dahrendorf (1990, pp. 81–82) on the “rules of the game” involved in constitutional politics: “They are, as I have argued and shall argue again, a necessary condition of the road to freedom, but they are not a sufficient condition.” What must follow is for the government to ensure the real conditions for the functioning of the Constitution.

The Local Elections

The most important political event following the adoption of the 1991 Constitution was the local election of mayors and members of the local councils in February, 1992—the first free local elections for 50 years. The campaign focused, naturally, on matters of public administration and communal services, but these elections were also significant for the evolution of political life. As the outcome revealed, these elections meant a new, important step toward a pluralist democratic way of life.

First, however, we must note the decline in the turnout, in comparison with May, 1990: only 65 per cent. This can be explained by the general climate of disappointment and worry because of the great social problems of the transition: the lowering of the living standard as a result of the economic downturn and of the shock of prices; the uncertainty of jobs; the delays in rural reform; the growth of corruption; and the lessening of respect for the law.

In the mayors’ election, the personal qualities of the candidates counted more than their party affiliation. Consequently, it makes sense to focus this analysis on the votes granted to the panels of candidates for councilors. In this way, we can reveal the changes in the political ratio of forces and in the political choice of the people.

Although 89 parties participated in the electoral campaign, only 13 gained more than 1 per cent of the vote. The National Salvation Front obtained only 33 per cent of the votes for councilors, which represented only half of the level attained in May, 1990, legislative elections. Although the Front obtained a plurality of the votes, it lost the absolute majority. At the same time, a “united opposition” appeared on the Romanian political scene—the Democratic Convention (CD), formed by the historic parties, in alliance with several new parties, which gained 24.3 per cent of the votes. In third place was the Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania (PDAR), with 7.3 per cent.

What are the principal explanations for these changes in comparison with May, 1990? On the one hand, the social structure of Romania has become more differentiated, especially as a result of the beginning of privatization. This has led to a more differentiated voting behavior. On the other hand, the Front has lost its popularity because it ruled the country in a period of crisis, and also, being a
heterogeneous group, it was marked by internal rifts. The option for the united opposition appears to be an expression of the hopes for a change for the better, while the votes for the "agrarians" mean, perhaps, the hope that their pragmatism could be more useful in the improvement of agricultural reform.

The 1992 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections

New parliamentary and presidential elections took place in September, 1992. The economic and social climate had changed little since February, 1992, but the price of transition had become more evident.

The new elections were another step in the development of a multi-party system in Romania. Out of 144 political parties registered before the elections, 88 submitted for candidacy for the House of Deputies and 74 for the Senate. Only 12 parties gained more than 3 per cent of votes—the minimum required for entering parliament, according to the new Election Law.

Who are they? The Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN), a new party resulting from the split of the National Salvation Front came first, with 27.7 per cent in the House of Deputies, and 28.2 per cent in the Senate. In second place was the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR), the united opposition that had partially restructured itself after the February elections. This group of parties gained 20.0 per cent and 20.1 per cent, respectively. In third place, the National Salvation Front (FSN), which gained 10.1 per cent and 10.3 per cent, respectively. The Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR), which declared itself a “national party” with the goal of defending the national, unitary, and indivisible Romanian state, came next with 7.7 per cent and 8.1 per cent, respectively. And, a short distance behind them, the Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR) with 7.4 per cent and 7.5 per cent, respectively. The other parties gained little more than 3 per cent.

For the presidential elections, there were six candidates. A second run-off election was necessary, with two competitors: Ion Iliescu—the acting president and candidate of FDSN—and Emil Constantinescu—the candidate of the CDR. Iliescu won, with 61.6 per cent of the votes (about 23.4 per cent less than in May, 1990).

What kind of political options did these results reveal? First, the persistent orientation of an important segment of the electorate toward a formula of equilibrium between market economy and social protection, as it appeared in the FDSN’s program. The main explanation of this choice can be found in the difficulties of transition.

Second, these elections revealed a greater confidence in the opposition. In fact, from the pluralist point of view, the most important significance of the 1992 elections in Romania is the crystallization of the opposition. As is well-known, the most distinctive feature between democratic pluralist regimes and totalitarian or authoritarian ones consists in the presence and activity of political opposition. Although in the last few local and legislative elections in pre-revolutionary Romania there were multiple candidates for each seat, this did not amount to real pluralism since all the contenders respected the political line of the only existing party.

It is possible to say that these elections have revealed a tendency towards a “diffused,” or even a “fragmented,” party system (in the terms of Smith, 1983, p. 86), the relatively large number of parties having a comparable share of the votes. It seems that the dispersion of power—as an essential goal of the pluralization process—was achieved. However, it is necessary to mention that the very large
The number of parties, their splits, and fusions have generated some confusion in the minds of the electorate.

As these post-1989 elections indicate, a process of political reconsideration is going on. Since 1992, even the party that won the plurality of votes (FDSN) has changed its name and is now called the Party of Social Democracy of Romania, while the party that had participated in the last elections as the National Salvation Front has become the Democratic Party (National Salvation Front). In the parties that are members of the Democratic Convention of Romania there have also been some changes regarding their alliances and leadership, especially as a result of the fact that these parties have formed their own parliamentary groups. Consequently, they are perceived by the people as being distinct entities. For example, a poll conducted by the Electoral Training '94 Program of the Soros Foundation revealed that the Christian Democratic National Peasant Party (a component of CDR) was quoted in second place in the electoral preferences of the people (with 14 per cent), while other parties of the same group gained no more than 6 per cent of the preferences (Adevarul, March 26–27, 1994).

Referring to the classification by Sartori (1976, p. 131) of party systems, Romania has to avoid the dangers involved in the so-called "polarized pluralism," characterized by the presence of too many relevant parties separated by significant ideological distances, by the prevalence of centrifugal drives, and by some other features that could be serious threats to democracy.

Some Other Components of Pluralism

Today's Romania is also characterized by the enormous proliferation of different non-party groups: trade unions, young people and students organizations, women's organizations, human rights groups, professional, scientific, or cultural associations, single-issue groups concerned with the rehabilitation of the victims of political repression, the return of expropriated properties, the environment, and so on. These groups are institutionalizing themselves and conducting programs to develop civic awareness and participation, in order to express and defend specific interests. This on-going process is very complex, and there are different points of view regarding the relationship between these kinds of organizations—which act in some cases as pressure groups—and the political ones.

The trade unions have organized themselves into different federations and confederations, but the process of their structuring is still developing. Their main goal is the collective negotiation of incomes and social protection policy. There are some difficulties in this respect: on the one hand, the resources of the Romanian society are at present very limited; on the other hand, this society is only at the beginning of a tripartite relationship as a real partnership—most of the negotiations took place between the trade unions and government because the employers are still organizing (The National Confederation of Romanian Employers was established only in April, 1992).

The classic confrontations regarding the relations between trade unions and political parties are to be found in Romania too. If, in the early post-revolutionary period, most of the trade unions declared themselves as non-party alliances, many of them now assert the necessity of being involved in politics, in different ways. Some of them declare their support for the parties that agree to include the trade unions' demands in their own programs; others are even willing to be involved in the process of government by having representatives in the executive branch.
Public opinion regarding the trade unions' role in social and political life is interesting to observe. A poll carried out by the Independent Center for Social Studies and Polls (CIS) in March, 1992, revealed that about half of the national sample was acquainted with the negotiations on the collective labor contract and the minimum wage, but people expressed a moderate trust in the trade unions' position; on the other hand, about three-quarters of those who were questioned considered it inappropriate for trade unions to advise their members on how to vote in elections (for or against certain parties) (Campeanu, 1993, p. 52). It is possible to explain this response by the fear that the trade unions could depart from their social and economic objectives if they become involved in the political struggle.

In the students' movement there are also two main trends. One of them is toward trade union-type organizations centered on professional and social problems, while another has emerged as much more political in orientation, expressing anti-communist attitudes and crystallizing around the University Square demonstrations that took place in Bucharest before and after the May, 1990, elections. However, an issue that remains to be resolved is a national structure of students' organizations that can serve as a partner in the dialogue with governmental and non-governmental institutions from Romania and from abroad.

We should also mention another association, "Civic Alliance", which was initiated by and composed of intellectuals who declared their aim to be to restore civil society as a road to the democratization of social and political life (Tismaneanu, 1993, p. 309). As in other ex-communist countries, a party was created by separating itself from this civic movement, the Civic Alliance Party, which is very active in the extra-parliamentary opposition.

And the examples could go on, because in today's Romania there are developing a great number of different kinds of private and public groups that are expressing material, professional, or moral interests or aspirations. Nevertheless, this numerical explosion does not automatically imply a pluralist network, since the channels by which these groups may influence the representative institutions and bureaucracies in shaping the policy process have not yet been well defined. Moreover, many interest groups have not yet a wide support because people are still reluctant to commit themselves to any kind of membership—in reaction to the former regimentation—and they focus on their own individual interests in a society that faces them with so many difficulties every day. The coalescence of new group interests is a process that has just begun.

Conclusions

We can conclude that in Romania, the legitimate institutions and the basic framework for pluralism have been established and this society is developing pluralist tendencies.

How can we define the current stage of Romanian politics from the pluralist point of view? If we take into account the number and the diversity of the political and non-political organizations, we could come to the conclusion that there is "too much" pluralism. It is obvious that for a population of less than 23 million and an electorate of about 16 million citizens, 164 parties are too many (this is the number of parties reported by the Romanian mass-media as being officially registered by January, 1994). As the 1992 elections demonstrated, this great number can produce confusion for those called upon to make a choice.

Is it only a "statistical" pluralism, or an authentic one? The answer depends, first, on the identity of the components of the system. Referring to the political
parties, although the major contemporary ideologies are to be found in Romania, it is a fact that the party programs are not well crystallized yet. Although the differentiation between right and left is not considered to be obsolete, most Romanian politicians characterize their ideas as belonging to the center, center-left or center-right. (For some considerations on the evolution of this differentiation over the last decades, see Mihut, 1992.) The main explanation for this is that the profile of the parties has not been defined sharply enough. Moreover, the public has not had a very clear image of what is signified by left or right. If we try to find a common denominator for this differentiation it is to say that the attitude toward transition is essential: the left supports a gradual transition, in which the intervention of the state assures the equilibrium between the economic changes and social protection, while the right supports a rapid change, with minimum intervention by the state. The process of finding their own identity is difficult because the parties are characterized by instability: splits and new alliances are frequent events.

In some respects, this looseness and instability characterizes the other groups too. The trade unions, which are engaged in disputes with each other, are a very significant example. Consequently, the relationship existing, on the one hand, among different groups, and, on the other hand, among these groups and the public authorities, is not yet consistent. The mechanism by which the interest groups—other than political parties—participate in the process of policy-making has to be improved.

All these aspects have resulted in the parties and other associations not being very effective in representing and mobilizing people. Therefore we can conclude that after the spectacular numerical explosion of the political and non-political associations in the post-revolutionary period, Romania is now going through the transition from this “statistical” pluralism to an authentic one.

There are some perils to be avoided, however, in this very complex and difficult process. The criticisms that Lowi (1969) made against interest-group liberalism a few decades ago have to be taken into account: if public authority is parcelled out into different interest groups it will result in a weak government, which is incapable of promoting the public interest. And it is worth remembering the new paradigm that Lowi (1969) had proposed: “juridical democracy,” based on the restoring of the “rule of law.” More recently, “hyperpluralism” has been used to describe that exaggerated form of pluralism in which groups have become too powerful in the political process and the relationship between groups and the government has become too cozy, so that consequently a contradictory and confusing policy has followed (Lineberry et al., 1991, p. 342).

Why is it so important for Romanians to take into account these perils? Because a society that has suffered from too much authority has almost a natural tendency to reject all kinds of authority. As Plato has said in the Republic, to do something in excess causes a change into a contrary excess. On the other hand, Romania, like other ex-communist countries, has to avoid the temptation of resorting to an authoritarian rule as a solution to the problems of transition that seem to be more and more complex.

How could this society find the right means for avoiding the excesses and for transcending the dilemmas of pluralist democracy? First of all, the consolidation of the constitutional-pluralist state appears to be necessary—that is, a stronger rule of law—not as an aim in itself, but as a means to consolidate the authority of democratic institutions, to eliminate corruption, and, consequently, to guarantee the freedom of pluralism. Since democratic pluralism does not appear spontaneously, the government must assume the responsibility of real management in
this respect, by assuring a proper framework and an efficient mechanism for expressing and defending the particular interests and aspirations specific to different groups. The responsibility, however, is shared by all the participants in the process. In this difficult period of transition, it is necessary for a convergence of the values and actions of all segments in society to take place. This means consensus—neither the “unanimity” (formal, of course) that characterized the pre-revolutionary period, nor even a majority, but a minimum of social and political agreement on which diversity can flourish and from which a vision of the national interest can be crystallized.

The final idea that I wish to emphasize in this context is the strong interdependence of political and economic transformations. As Przeworski (1993, p. 189) stated, referring to the societies that are now in the process of transition to democracy and market-oriented economic reforms: “The durability of the new democracies will depend, however, not only on their institutional structure and the ideology of the major political forces, but to a large extent on their economic performance.” This is what I consider to be the major challenge for Romania.

References