

The Political Process in the Romanian Transition: A Structural Explanation

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*The post-revolutionary political process has been not only frustrating but also, difficult to explain. Contrary to rather superficial yet frequently invoked explanations we propose an explanatory theory based on a structural model of socio-economic groups and their relationships. One of the cornerstones used to explain political processes is represented by the couple/duality “technocracy” / historical parties. The central hypothesis of this analysis is as follows: the process of transition to a multiparty system will depend on the way in which political parties will emerge vis-à-vis the technocracy. **a.** If new parties are generated by the internal differentiation of the existing technocracy, the transition will take place via organic, economic and socio-economic reforms in a balanced way and with moderate conflicts; initially, the consensus will be relatively strong; gradually, in the absence of major social and political conflicts, different political and ideological programmes are established on the basis of which new parties emerge. **b.** If the emergence of new parties will take place in a significant measure outside the technocracy, the transition process will tend to be characterised by changes involving clashes marked by major incongruent features.*

A sudden unexpected and frustrating political change

The Revolution was characterised by a huge sigh of relief, firstly and foremostly in the political sphere. The first hope for this Revolution was the replacement of the oppressive and arbitrary communist policies with a real democratic system in which the community could play an effective role in the management of the Romanian society.

Right from the start though, the population manifested its profound disagreement vis-à-vis this very sphere where most of its hopes had been invested. During the first post-revolutionary month, politics became but one of the major factors of alienation and discouragement. The major shock the collective being owed to the gap between the expectations generated by the Revolution and reality. Later, the political system itself appears to the community to be the determining factor for the transition’s shortcomings.

Beyond emotional reactions, it is self-evident the fact that the political process in Romania undertook a highly charged shape, marked by various forms of violence along the way. Hence, exploring this rather unexpected shape of the political process as well as its associated emotional tensions becomes a meaningful endeavour.

The first question that arises inevitably refers to the general shape of the political process: is it specific to all East European countries in transition or is it that, beyond the commonality of East European changes, the most shocking processes are but peculiarities of the Romanian transition? The conclusion of the analysis presented

in this study is that the dynamic of Romanian politics had a strong specificity generated by an internal logic peculiar to the past thirteen-year's social structure.

I could thus synthesise six themes of the shock generated by the political changes in Romania.

1. From consensus to polarisation. The community was shocked by the rapid transition from the high level of consensus and solidarity apparent in the early days of the Revolution to a subsequent explosion of violent political conflict. It was to be expected that the political will, which was initially highly consensual and centred on rather abstract options that were insufficiently specified by this change, will be corrected by a differentiation of the political options. The odds-on chance was that the transition which was initiated by the Revolution will be a combination of *fundamental consensus* – replacing the communist model with a Western capitalist one, promoting democracy as a means of attaining freedom – and *differences* in what regards the strategies employed for attaining the common objective, not necessarily characterised by profound *conflicts*. The initial consensus was rapidly and violently questioned in the political arena. The radical political polarisation that replaced this consensus was based not so much on different *political programmes* as it was based on abstract ideological accusations. A suspicion that important political forces intend to reinstate communism in one way or another with accusations of Gorbachiovism, neo-communism, crypto-communism, “communist mentalities”, “belonging to the old Securitate apparatus” poisoned relations between parties. Even recently, in a speech made by an important leader of the opposition, there were surprising accusations of “Bolshevism”. Even the idea of consensus, whether partial or otherwise, was, due to this political perception, rejected as representing an unacceptable manipulation technique.

Of course, the persistence of communist nostalgia/mentalities was inevitable though the great majority of the population did not consider this to be strong enough to render significant political aftershocks. What's more, it was to be expected that such aftershocks would diminish once the strategies for change crystallised. The extremely violent political and ideological polarisation was based on an assumption of a dangerous communist plot – which, incidentally, the majority of population thought it to be highly unlikely. Naturally, we must therefore identify the factors that led to such a presupposition being formed in certain sectors of politics.

2. The substitution of objectives: from democracy as participation and freedom to democracy as an institution and the imposition of *politically correct options*. A shift in the democratic principle's meaning from **its intrinsic content** – i.e. the will of the community – to the **institutions** that any one political force may consider it to be the true guarantor of democracy, regardless of what the community thinks. Paradoxically, groups that called themselves “true democrats” were at the same time promoting an ideology more akin to politic elitism espousing views such as: the population is not ideologically and politically mature, it is not prepared for freedom and ‘true democracy’. Various election results were often contested while more often than not they were attributed to the lack of democratic maturity, to the “stupidity of the masses” who needed a father figure and could not shed their communist mentality.

- 3. From democratic aspirations to the typically anti-democratic political behaviour.** No one expected the advent of democracy to be a process that would be problem free. After freeing itself from the socialist regime's authoritarian structures that had become increasingly primitive, fiercely anti-democratic forms were unlikely to be accepted by the community. Contrary to expectations, such anti-democratic manifestations occurred and generated important moral and political after-shocks. The month of January 1990 witnessed attempts to gain power through the use of force, with street confrontations between supporters of various political forces. Then came the famous "University Square" experience – hotly disputed in respect of its true democratic credentials. For some, it represented the manifestation of true democratic, anti-Communist ideals. Others perceived it as more of a manifestation of radical, minority groups that were indifferent to the opinion of the majority. After the May 1990 elections, the persistence of the "University Square" phenomenon questioned the very principle of complying with the result of democratically held elections. In response to this, the first of the miners' raid on Bucharest – which was clearly politically induced – created a precedent of political violence that was much more dangerous than even the "University Square" phenomenon had been before. The attempt to bring back the King hence re-instate the monarchy in the context of a popular perception that was by and large anti-monarchist represented an attempt to win political power not via the ballot box but through the establishment of an institution that would support a particular political section against others. Not least, the ferocity of public accusations was possibly even more shocking for the community.
- 4. Rejecting the exploration of alternatives.** In the first years of the transition there existed a most curious ideological theme: blaming *originality*. There were pejorative connotations attached to the malaise of originality when there was no need to be original: the expression "our original democracy" had become almost a fashion. The fear of originality at a time of discoveries and innovations remains difficult to explain. I believe the reason for that to be what I term as the *epistemology of the unique solution*. There is no single historical way for the transition nor there is any single strategy of the transition as roughly sketched by international organisations and Western specialists alike. What ought to be done is the rapid implementation of the reform contained in this strategy. Any attempt to explore possible alternatives was plagued by suspicions of ulterior motives, veiled under the guise of communist mentalities that did nothing but delayed reform or even blocked it.

The distorting effect of this epistemology appears mostly in the way democracy was conceived. Democracy had no longer any connection with "the will of the community" as it could be deemed politically incorrect on top of carrying the *germs* of communist mentality. Arguably, the sole democratic creed was the adoption and rapid implementation of reform, regardless of the will of the 'backward' masses. Thus, anticommunist representatives, indifferent to the will of the masses, were the only true democrats.

Yet why such an option? The explanation could lie in the irrational fear of a return to communism. Any search for alternatives is perceived as representing this exact type of danger. Hence, the safest bet was to bank on the "added value" of the reform strategy developed by Western specialists while excluding any critical analysis of this strategy. The idea of reform was comprehended in a thoroughly simplistic way as the only possible way forward. Thus, the only question still standing was whether

the pace of the reform ought to be slow or rapid. The cornerstone for rejecting any exploration of alternatives appears to have the following rationale: it is not very important the quality of the reform strategy accepted; any change would be promoted as it is positive in as far as it represents a departure from communism.

5. The traditional Romanian mentality as the telling factor. No other instance in Romania's history was characterised by such a violent rejection by intellectuals of the Romanian national character. Alongside the old communist nomenclature and the Securitate people, the ultimate responsibility for the transition's principal failures is placed almost wholly on the 'negative characteristics' of the Romanian people. It is quite strange hence important, much as any unusual phenomenon is, to explain the obsessive criticism of "Romanianism". A crude explanation of any failure is three-dimensional: the action plan, the conditions and the actor itself. If the transition strategy is axiomatically adequate, and if the West had indeed offered continuous backing thus creating an internationally supportive context, what explanation is there left for the severely negative results? Obviously, the population's incapacity! The lack of capitalist, democratic experience was the mildest criticism that could be made. Usually, what is invoked is culture, tradition, in one word – "Romanianism". If the hypothesis formulated here is indeed, at least partially true, it is but thoroughly depressing: the Romanians' assuming the blame was a massive excuse for the Western strategy's defects and, what is more important, a powerful ideological tool to keep a lid on any so-called attempts to resuscitate communism. I cannot avoid drawing an unpleasant parallel between the danger of communism in Romania and the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

6. The frequent call for Western support by Romanian political forces in their struggle against other political forces. The prestige of Western political forces cannot nullify democracy's fundamental rule that parties must build their electoral support internally. Contrary to this rule, certain political parties have continuously and openly requested Western supporting against political adversaries. Spreading grave accusations, world-wide, against political adversaries was common practice also. Adding to that, Western political forces were keen to take sides, in one way or another, and support certain Romanian political forces against others, furthering unfounded accusations, which they considered to be credible.

As a result of multiple distortions present within political relationships, the medium of political communication, which was filled to the brim by conflicts and partisan accusations while astoundingly lacking any real appetite for discussions about directions and strategies for change, gave the community an impression of replacing a "communist" lie, with an "anticommunist" one. Replacing the hope for a real freedom with a lot of bickering and partisan political manipulations was an important factor that created the post-Revolutionary despondency and disillusionment.

Current Explanatory Theories

Several factors are currently invoked in order that unexpected and, at the same time, frustrating evolutions of the political system in transition are explained.

The personalities' theory. The common explanation appeals to the role of the *participants* in the process: Iliescu, Coposu, Roman, Constantinescu etc. As they occupied key positions in steering the political process, they left an indelible imprint on it. However correct such a perspective may be, it remains utterly superficial for political leaders always act in a complex context, which constantly shapes their options.

The confrontation between ideological and political programmes theory. The period of transition was dominated by the confrontation between three main ideological currents, passionately invoked during political debates: the programme for changing the socialist society into a democratic one, based on the market economy of a European type; communist mentalities leaning towards the modernisation of socialism; emphasising the punishment of those responsible for the communist regime and the re-instatement of social, economic and political structures abolished by communism.

The Romanian people's negative tradition theory. Another explanation invokes not so much the political transition actors' individual contribution or the confrontation between orientations as much as it emphasises the cultural characteristics of the Romanian people i.e. the Romanian people's negative traditions. Thus, the Romanian's aspirations for change are constantly hijacked and have the breaks on due to their "peculiar conduct habits".

The theory of the inevitability of difficulties arising from any profound social change. Beyond the social actors' enthusiastic expectations, the change is accompanied by profound difficulties and tensions generated by different components stepping out of synch as well as the time needed for new mentalities and institutions to settle in. Most certainly, this theory is equally correct. Yet, contrary to popular expectations, profound changes are marred by persistent incongruent features and tensions straining this evolving process. The lack of cultural as well as political, economic and social experience noticeable in the new directions of change is too but a general factor used to explain all transition processes. Such an explanation is correct yet it is far too abstract for it explains a class of phenomena – tensions, conflicts, incongruent features – that is far too general thus failing to explain its peculiarities.

Invoking subjective individual or collective factors could explain, in the measure in which this evocation is correct, the incidence level of the said process, yet this too is far from sufficient. Not even the recourse to abstract reasoning of the kind that any change is difficult fails to suffice.

The theory of "this is normal in a democratic system". If the population "spectating" the political process expresses a high degree of disappointment then, there will be certain political actors who will be tempted to promote a semblance of "normality" vis-à-vis the political process. Contrary to the population's naïve yet moralist illusions, the normalcy of the democratic process is a completely different matter. A very important political leader used to say, a few years after the Revolution, honestly believing that the norm in a democratic system is one where "the political game has no morals; its only rule being to gain power".

The multiparty political system is fundamentally based on competition. Hence, parties are but actors fighting for votes. It is inevitable that the political fight

assumes quite violent forms, morality becomes a mere footnote, and mutual accusations go beyond the “true or false” distinction, while unrealistic promises become the norm. Politics is not controlled by external norms much as certain social sectors are. By comparison, let us consider another highly competitive sector, totally different from politics, sport. Here too, you will encounter adversaries fighting for power. Yet “bellow the belt” blows are quite efficiently controlled not only by the public and the media, but also by referees invested with the authority to do so. In politics there can be no instance that distinguishes fair play from unfair play. Apart from the community that gives an electoral verdict through its voting every four years there can be no other referee accepted. No other institution but that of elections can exert political party control, with the exception of certain components that are not intrinsically political – be they legal or financial. Only through the regulation offered by elections can political competition be maintained in the limits of fair play and civilisation.

In current analyses, explanatory theories are invoked quite diffusely. Each one of them holds a partial truth – all together though, offer but an explanatory picture that is rather confused as much as it is superficial. The political process’ profound factors remain rather unexplored. I believe it is necessary to build an explanatory model much more persuasive.

An explanatory hypothesis theory

The theory formulated here is based on the idea that in order to explain **the political system’s profile and dynamic during the period of transition, the key to this explanation is to be found in the structural configuration of the social groups engaged in the ongoing social and economic changes.** Particularly, I will seek to explain the **mass of political processes and events through the mechanisms of establishing the political class and the adjacent political parties, as well as their programmes.**

Patent from standard theories, an important hypothesis that requires consideration is that technocracy – both in the socialist period, as much as in the transition one – bears the hallmarks of a distinct social class. During the transition period, the dynamic of technocracy vis-à-vis all other political forces is the crucial factor shaping it. In particular, the couple technocracy/political parties will be looked at quite extensively. The central hypothesis of the theory presented here for scrutiny is as follows:

The shape of the process of transition to a multiparty system will depend on the way in which political parties will emerge vis-à-vis the existing technocracy:

- a) If new political parties will be engendered via the internal differentiation of the existing technocracy, the transition will occur by means of organic reforms, in a balanced way, and with reasonable conflicts; initially, the consensus will be relatively strong; gradually, without any major social and political conflicts, there will arrive on the scene new political programmes and distinctive ideologies that will be the cornerstone for these new political parties’ emergence.
- b) If these new political parties’ emergence is to happen in any significant measure outside technocracy, the transition process will tend to be characterised by conflicting changes marred by significantly incongruent features.

The establishment of the new political class

The socialist society's social structure

The socialist society's social configuration at the time of the fall of socialism was made of the following groups:

The communist political class as a social class

If we understand the term **political class** as *the totality of active actors in the political process*, the communist regime, due to its failure to allow any kind of alternative political participation, is characterised by an undifferentiated, unique political class. Hence, the communist political class is made up of people who occupy executive positions in the communist society. Regrettably, these people are not really elected by democratic means as the group that has the power – some of which are but lifetime members of the political class – selects them instead. The distinguishing feature though is the fact that, complementary to their supposed adherence to the communist ideology, they occupy executive functions in the political system. Members to this class are career politicians or, as they were better known in the communist political jargon, “professional activists”. If the selection process for executive positions in certain sectors of the social life (i.e. directors of various institutions, specialists etc.) was more or less done on criteria of professional competence (that had to be adjacent to political criteria), as far as political leadership was concerned, this was the result of a long-term process of selection, during the lifetime of a distinguished political career.

The communist political class has a specific historical dynamic. In every European socialist country, the group of indigenous communist leaders that had attained power after the war was made up of professional activists who were selected by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, initially. The establishment of communism in Romania enlarged the communist class quite exponentially, although the new members' selection nucleus, that retained ideological and political power, remained unchanged. Nevertheless, political professionalism accentuated while continuing to distance itself from the society's technical leadership section. The result of this process was one that allowed the executive political class to remain rather limited in size. Despite the fact that the Romanian Communist Party had over four million members, in fact, it did not form a political class as such. This was reduced to political leaders and, partially, to the political apparatus employees. The regime was propped up by the international forces of the socialist camp that were subordinated to the Soviet Union and, in subsidiary, by the domestic forces of repression. Yet, the latter could not be powerful enough to resist, long term, outside the international umbrella of the Communist system.

Even the Communist sole political class as allowed by the Communist system, had become smaller in the last decades. This streamlining process was caused by the combination of two factors: the acute crisis of the Communist system as well as Ceausescu's private dictatorship. Many of those who held executive positions in the State apparatus and/or the Party hierarchy became but Yes men of Ceausescu's authoritarian brand of politics yet their dissatisfaction with this style of politics grew consequently. On the other hand, they could not detach themselves from the Communist system's internal dynamic.

Except for the very members of the communist political class, the vast majority of *people interested in politics* was made up of passive opponents of the system who had their attempts at political organisation and action paralysed by harsh repression and a lack of international opportunities for change. This large segment interested in politics shared a negative attitude towards the communist regime yet they lacked any political programme. The Romanian society's evolution was determined not so much by inside factors, but by the international configuration i.e. the international communist network at the centre of which was the Soviet Union and its relationship with western powers. The deep uncertainty concerning the future evolution of the world made political actors mere spectators who lacked any real perspective. Moreover, it was unrealistic to expect of them to design any distinctive, coherent political programmes.

According to the communist model of social organisation, the communist political class can be considered to be a *social class*, in the standard meaning of the word. It did not promote, as it happens in the capitalist system, the interests of social classes, as their political and ideological representation. The Communist political class was not the democratic representation of the entire population's interests, as the Communist ideology proposed, nor was it that of certain social groups as it represented as a matter of fact the logic of the communist organisational model. Thus, the communist political class expressed nothing more than its interests.

Workers and peasants were defined by the communist ideology as the regime's leading social force. Yet, apart from the very first years that followed the establishment of the communist regime, all power was rapidly taken away from workers as much as it was taken away from peasants. They were kept under surveillance by a repressive political system as they were controlled by a technocratic class that, in the meantime, had gained key positions in the technical, administrative, social and cultural apparatus. Workers could express their dissatisfaction only through violent outbreaks, stymied through various forms of control, including force in critical situations. Furthermore, out of ideological considerations and a desire to maintain the social equilibrium, the communist power, in the absence of handing out any political power to workers or peasants, tried to provide social benefits instead. Such benefits included unlimited access to workplaces, wages that were closer to those in the technocratic class and other benefits.

The technocratic / intellectual class. The use of standard social class pattern shaded the technocracy's place and distinct role in the socialist society. In spite of its ideology, the communist regime had turned technocracy into a distinct and increasingly influential social class, whose specific social and political interests and orientations were different from what could be termed as the communist social class i.e. the Party activists. The socialist system's technocracy had a different position to that in the capitalist system. Here, it is controlled by the political system rather than by private capital owners.

The technocratic / intellectual class was made up of two large groups: those who occupied technical positions thus, in effect, leading the entire social system, and those who, as specialists, operated according to an advanced set of scientific data, i.e. engineers, economists, administrators, scientists, doctors, professors, mass-media specialists, literati, artists – all those who may or may not have occupied executive positions, but who certainly had an elevated social status.

Despite communism's authoritarian character, the Romanian society had developed and even managed to expand a rather large variety of modern sub-systems, in modern though highly distorted forms. The specialists' competence was a vital

source for the modernisation of the society and, in the final years of the communist regime, for managing the technical and administrative system administration against the backdrop of a rapidly deteriorating economic crisis.

After the communist regime was established, the leading role of “the working classes and the peasantry” which, from an ideological standpoint, ought to have been the key to the new social structure, was rapidly taken over by the technocracy. More and more, technocracy sought to become an institutional, non-political system of managing the society that, despite being guided by political decisions, was not in itself political in nature. Due to its sector leadership as well as its competence in different spheres of the social life, it acquired a key social position coupled with social and cultural prestige.

The technocracy’s specific ideology, which was developed in the communist system, is based on three values of modernity, different from those of the political class: technical and administrative **competence**, which is characteristic of every modern technocracy, technical and administrative **consensus** and internal **solidarity**. Artisans of a modern system similar, in many respects, to that in western democracies, the Romanian technocrats presented a vision that was distinct from the political one, and even opposed to it.

Political and technocratic values’ configuration had a complex dynamic attached to it. The Romanian communist regime never managed to achieve full political loyalty from the technocracy. Except for the large-scale subordination of the technical to the political differences and tensions between them became increasingly marked both from an ideological options point of view as well as from the point of view of practical activities. As the social organisation became increasingly complex, complementary to socialism’s ever-deepening crisis, technocracy – as a way of thinking – became more and more independent vis-à-vis the communist politics and ideology as it demonstrated a tendency to move towards various forms of hostility. The Romanian society’s constituent sectors became increasingly autonomous in relation to the country’s global politics. The precedence of each sector’s technical values becomes an important source of resistance of the technical vis-à-vis the political.

The technocratic class had gained competence and had developed scientific, cultural and technical values that were increasingly hostile to the communist ideology while it created networks with a certain degree of cohesion. This class had by now nurtured fervent ambitions of socially changing the communist system yet, by the time the regime fell, it had no clear political orientation that is usually noticeable through articulated political programmes. Because of the fact that socialist societies’ avenues for change were dependent, fundamentally, of the international socialist systems’ configuration as much as of the relationship between the two systems, technocracy failed to crystallise a political vision in its own right. The political ideology shaped at the level of the technocracy was centred on the following value duality: western style modernisation, intellectual and technical performance, technocratic power and a diffuse aspiration towards western capitalist organisation, as much as it was geared towards socialist values based more on the technocratic rationality rather than one with “a human face”. The least clear component of this ideological complex however, was the *form of ownership*. This was not a crucial element as far as technocracy was concerned.

While the political retained a firm grip on all major social decisions, the technocracy developed an increasingly efficient system of controlling the political class and system. Thus, the technocrats permeated the political system as they attained

political functions without losing sight of their technocratic values. In turn, the political system was forced to assimilate some of these technocratic values to enable it to administer an increasingly complex society that had entered a period of profound crisis. Inevitably, in order that the system was kept running, politicians were forced by the logic of things to assimilate technocrats in executive positions based on criteria of competence rather than on political criteria. The political leadership's increasingly outlandish policies helped to clarify anticommunist options. Especially during the eighties, technocracy had become increasingly hostile towards the communist regime. A tendency to distance itself from the communist regime was notable even in the political system, including the apparatus of repression i.e. the police, the army, and even in the Securitate (i.e. the secret police).

Contrary to common perceptions, technocracy was anything but the flagpole for socialist / social-democratic values. It did not express employee's interests, nor did it show any special sensitivity for social issues; moreover, its main interest appeared to be akin to values that have helped shape modern systems while its main concern remained vis-à-vis specialists and institutional management. Industrial development, promoted by the Communist Party as a priority objective, placed technocracy in a real conundrum: though it became invested with the role of managing this process, it was nonetheless kept under a severe political and ideological control. The working class, which in effect lacked any real power, was frequently used to check the power of the technocracy. Hence, a structural conflict between managers/technocrats and workers became inevitable. Gradually, the technocrats acquired power in factories as the workers lost any role in their management. The intervention of central political power maintained a modicum of equilibrium which limited the technocratic tendency to acquire absolute power in factories and introduce as a result of that fact strict discipline. The limits imposed on the organisational power of the technocracy were its greatest dissatisfaction. The policy of promoting equality was totally unacceptable. Its concern was how to accentuate the social stratification according to the position occupied in the management of the social and economic system.

The post-revolutionary configuration of the social structure

The 1989 Revolution changed the Romanian society's composition extremely fast and in a radical way. The fall of the communist system opened up a new perspective of historical evolution, as the community was shaken out of its passive yet tentative torpor. The social classes and groups that existed in communism were given a fresh make-up because of the opportunities for change created by the Revolution. Along these lines new political groupings were established that were actively seeking political and ideological programmes that were shaped by this new historical perspective.

The communist political class, characterised by an ever-diminishing size, practically disappeared once it lost political power. Ceausescu's totalitarian dictatorship that had accentuated the economic crisis of the eighties as much as it added to the communist system's political and moral crisis created a massive lack of popularity for the communist option. The violence of the Revolution did nothing but accentuate this political departure, as the small ex-communist leaders' segment lost any chance to take part in political activity in the historical aftermath of the fall of the entire communist system. In counter-distinction to other former socialist countries where communist parties continued to exist, however different ideologically-speaking they may have been subsequent to this historic fall, the Romanian

Communist Party was not accepted as a legitimate political force of any democracy, and died of natural causes in the very first days of the Revolution. As the Romanian Communist Party was purged from politics, the small segment of people with true communist beliefs was equally eliminated. Sporadic attempts by small groups of the former nomenclature to put the Party on a political ventilator were doomed to fail, as the Party remained the popular object of hate.

Technocracy had, in fact, taken over the management of the whole of the society. It had largely substituted the old communist political class from current political management duties. The management of the economy, which was still state property, was freed from the classical political factor and became the technocracy's exclusive responsibility.

The working class revealed itself mostly through a rapid and extensive syndicate movement. Syndicates had created new power equilibrium within factories. From a political point of view, they converged with the technocracy as far as avenues for change for the Romanian society were concerned. However, their main focus was on wages. The fundamental direction for this new found solidarity with the managers was centred on preserving their factories and obtaining state financial support to re-launch them in the new economic climate. What this alliance could not achieve was create efficient systems of production. In the absence of any outside control (i.e. by the capital owner or, the state), the management used such state enterprises as their personal source of income, which seldom had any relation to the enterprise's economic performance. Internal resources as much as resources coming from the state budget with the aim of sustaining the economy were exploited by managers and employees alike and distributed according to the rules of the system and the power equilibrium between the two factions.

Through their very position, syndicates could not enter the political system as actors in their own right yet they obtained a crucial political role that was quite specific.

The peasantry was involved in the often confusing and sometimes frustrating process of attaining land ownership. The result of this transformation process was an extremely divided ownership of the land as well as a lack of equipment and financial capital. Moreover, the growth of unemployment had a dramatic impact on reducing the rural population's opportunities to work in the industrial sector.

Businessmen did not exist at the beginning of the transition process, and, in the very process of their development as a social class, many of them began to be interested in politics.

The Establishment of a New Political Class

The Revolution had given political action a new sense of urgency. Potential political actors, inhibited by the communist system's hindrances, suddenly found themselves in a political situation characterised by a lot of pent up freedom.

The Revolution did not stumble upon well-organised groups, politically and ideologically speaking, that could be the active actors needed to develop the new political system. This was the case for all former communist states because of the randomness of the historical context.

In the new political context, two groups, characterised by different political perspectives, became active: the technocracy – which held key executive functions in the entire society – and anticommunist political groups. The only people politically active in the final years of communism were isolated individuals or very small groups

i.e. dissidents. In Romania, this segment was remarkably small and consequently, insignificant. The combination of repression and tolerance made the dissidents a fragmented group that had little or no influence. Any attempt to organise itself – thus, endanger the monopoly the Communist Party had on power – was brutally repressed yet, isolated protests were relatively tolerated. Groups of ex-members of the political parties disenfranchised by communism proved to be better organised as they became rather active political factors that, paradoxically, pushed dissident movements into second place.

The Technocracy's Political Activation

After the Revolution, the only class that held political power due to better organisation based on functional relationships as much as it was founded on a spirit of solidarity was the technocracy. Few changes occurred: those who had been too active in the communist political system were sidelined. Equally so were those who had held executive functions due to their cunning use of political mechanisms rather than their professional ability. In 1990, the rapid increase in the number of jobs in different activity sectors, especially public (administration, education, health) attracted many, in particular, young people in the new technocratic structures.

The Revolution had freed the technocracy from the Communist Party intrusion and bestowed it with absolute executive power of the society. Not surprisingly, one of the first newly adopted laws gave enterprises, in fact their executive boards, quasi-absolute autonomy. The privatisation of the economy, though accepted as part of the Western capitalist model as much as it was seen as a means of increasing its power through the acquisition of capital, had not necessarily been the key element of technocratic policies. The illusion that freeing the economy from political control would bestow upon it the possibility of rapid development was quickly shattered. The post-Revolutionary economic crisis put enterprises' in an extremely vulnerable position. The pressures exerted by the technocracy were twofold: on the one hand, there was an attempt to eliminate State control from enterprise management while, on the other, State support was sought to overcome economic problems these enterprises were facing as well as their re-launch. To a large extent, enterprises became but systems that exploited, in different forms, the budgetary resources.

The core of the consensus developed during the Revolution was founded mainly on the consensus that existed inside technocracy – one that was based on the values of modernity, liberty, democracy and the implementation of the Western model of society, including the process of European integration. This type of consensus, loosely defined in details rather than outline, was equally shared by the vast majority of the population. Without a shadow of a doubt, the option for reforming the existing system was characteristically technocratic. Socialism had created a deeply distorted ideologically and politically, yet modern society that, consequently, needed to be reorganised by eliminating the distortions created by communism as much as by general social development. The technocratic programme was thus centred on **reform through change and development**.

Technocracy constituted the backbone of the National Salvation Front (FSN) and, subsequently, of the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PDSR). Technocracy represented a solid political offshoot of the State and an essential tool for the transition in as far as administering, including privatising, the economy.

The new political party was far from representing the social-democratic spirit. Even during communism, the bulk of the technocracy was responsible for

administering the economy rather than devise social policies which it tended to equate with typical components of communist policies. During the socialist economy's lengthy crisis, the technocracy was interested in safeguarding the economy i.e. massively pumping resources towards crisis-affected sectors. In the final stages of the Romanian communist regime social policies were virtually amputated to save the economy.

The technocracy, which was more interested in propping up the economy, tended to ignore the grey clouds of social problems that were gathering fast. During the final decades, the competition between economic and social policies had accentuated: Ceausescu's communist regime had given the economy absolute priority as it only marginally maintained a modicum of social equilibrium for the sake of preventing popular unrest. This is why social programmes in Romania were financed at a ludicrously low level compared to other socialist countries in the region. Even after the Revolution, though certain adjustments occurred in this area, existing financial support remained less than that available in other countries in transition. Nonetheless, as the PDSR needed mass electoral support, it had to demonstrate an increased social awareness hence, social programmes were on the whole given a stronger impetus.

Meanwhile, historical parties were banking not so much on social policies to gain electoral support but on naïve promises of a reform process based on a massive show of support by the West that would eventually help to redress the country's economy. Moreover, a somewhat strident anticommunist radicalism criticised the PDSR for being a party beset by an ingrained communist mentality. Thus, social programmes remained insignificant during transition though certain pressures were about to change that. Even the often-invoked *transition with inevitable social cost* formula expressed a vision that was nowhere near social democracy. Thus, social democratic policies were considered to be but a hand break on a transition journey that was further beset by reservations expressed about their being but the result of communist mentalities. The PDSR's leanings towards social democracy were gradually crystallised due to external factors.

First of all, due to the historical parties' occupation of the right of the political continuum, the PDSR was artificially pushed towards the left. Should this have failed to happen, it could be argued that the PDSR would rather have occupied the right of the continuum had it not found that side already busy. The constant labelling of the PDSR by the historical parties not just as a party of the left but as a communist party as such must have had a bearing on its eventually identifying itself with social democracy.

Secondly, the technocracy's lack of liberal inclinations was notable in its opting for state mechanisms as instruments for the transition. Finally, in its struggle against historical parties, the PDSR was forced to seek popular support that could not have been achieved without some kind of an attention paid to social problems.

It is interesting to note that the FSN's schism into the factions Iliescu/Roman did not have an ideological component attached to it as both factions preserved the social democratic credo. The new Democratic Party (PD) led by Roman, contrary to the fact that during its time in office had exhibited a markedly liberal programme, had enrolled in the Socialist International. The transition, which was but an extremely painful social event, could not have been carried out without significant social support. The PDSR still, appears to be strongly in favour of exhibiting a certain social coldness which is rather characteristic for the technocracy. Proof of that is the fact that the economy has been strongly supported by the technocracy from the state sector

while social programmes were rather ignored. Moreover, public social expenditure was right from the start and it continues to be well below that in other countries in transition. Historical parties were even less interested by the social problematic thus making the PDSR appear even more to the left than it really is. In fact, the PDSR's social policies are rather moderate if not outright right wing.

Because of that, social policy institutions remained relatively under-developed and were expanded, paradoxically, more because of foreign policy considerations rather than internal platform options. Consequently, due to their lacking an articulated social programme, many social themes were simply imposed by the West.

The ex-politicians of parties disbanded by the communist regime

As they reappeared on the political scene, the former members of parties disbanded after the war were a surprise package. Few expected this small group to have any importance. Initially, they appeared to have little chance of forming political parties with sufficient appeal to the population. Their public image suffered from their being elderly, practically unknown to the population, with the merit of having endured the harshness of communist prisons after which they were forced to live on the margins of society, without any opportunities for developing the competence needed to engage themselves at different levels of management and rather dominated by a will to take revenge against those responsible for their suffering as they carried on looking more to the past than the future.

What gave them distinctiveness was their systematic anticommunist orientation. Such merit, however, was hardly likely to impress either the technocracy or the vast majority of the population. For the technocracy, communism was a bad dream, which it had released itself of and not a windmill of a political obsession with which it had to battle constantly. As regards the latter, crucial political issues referred to fashioning the future rather than judging the past. The remnants from the political parties disbanded by communism came up with a completely different political programme from the technocracy's: a straightforward anticommunist one, centred on the political exclusion of those who had in any shape or form been linked to communism, complementary to eliminating every structure inherited from the old regime was likely to sustain a healthy and profound change. Even if nation-wide such a programme was but peripheral, in the West, due to peculiar conditions, such a programme gained a high degree of credibility as significant political and financial resources were mobilised to support it. Why such an attitude?

My guess is that the West had a different perspective and a different agenda to that of the majority of internal actors. The latter, coming thick and fast from the ranks of the technocracy, prioritised the issue of finding solutions to the multiple crises facing the Romanian society alongside Western models. By contrast, the West offered diminished attention to the immediate problems facing the post-communist society being more interested in settling the score with the communist foe. Hence, the rock solid guarantee that the communist system would be totally eliminated was the support offered to political groups with radical anticommunist programmes. If internally, communism had lost any significance, for the West, burning the last remnants of communism at the stake was the main objective.

Thus, as the technocracy was condensed massively in a single political party, it failed to offer the West enough credibility to make it believe it could fulfil such a mission. This was not because it may have had procommunist leanings but because it was simply not interested in a punitive political programme where development was

not the priority. Anticommunist programmes centred on the ideological component were hardly a crowd pleaser for either the technocracy or for the vast majority of the population. The majority of internal actors focused their attention on more pragmatic means of managing an economic and social system that was going through a difficult transition period. Moreover, the technocracy felt as the butt of unfounded accusations of solidarity with the communist regime.

The strong support offered by the West to anticommunist political groups was the main reason for the growth of activity within former political parties rather than their exhibited anticommunist radicalism. In particular, it was that segment unhappy at not being able to find a niche in the technocratic conglomerate that was attracted by the historical parties.

A large group of adventurers who took advantage of the sudden and explosive openings created by political freedom.

We cannot ignore those over one hundred parties drumming up support on the political scene immediately after the Revolution that, due to their lack of ideological consistency as much as popular support rapidly disappeared. Some extremely odd characters founded such parties – indeed, true political adventurers that were attracted by naïve illusions or, more often, by the generous support of a Government keen to demonstrate its support for the development of democracy. Such parties nevertheless, had no other option against the massive technocratic and historical parties' presence.

The advent of this myriad of new parties can be explained via the 'existence' of a political organisation vacuum: the strongest candidates for political crystallisation – the technocrats – failed to offer any redoubtable political formations. Upon this failure, the first category of transition 'profiteers' came along. They 'founded' parties made up of just their family members supported, more often than not, by lists of fictitious adherents; thus, official headquarters and cash was obtained only to be used afterwards as head offices for their firms and the money used for their business affairs.

Consequently, technocracy remained the great reservoir for the future political class. It represented a strong social class not just from a technical standpoint but from its social status coupled with the will and ability to engage in the construction of the new social system. It was to be expected therefore that the new political class was going to be shaped along technocratic lineage. Its ability to differentiate politically via repositioning itself after that period of initial consensus to the creation of a plurality of directions and strategies for change proved to be slower than was expected under the pressure cooker of the time. The consensus about the direction of change in a non-communist way animated the technocracy's ideological option towards building the future rather than fighting the past.

The genesis of political parties in Romania

Political parties were established as a conditional reaction to an atypical need: not as the expression of different social groups' interests but as an answer to an urgent demand for a multiparty, representative democracy.

The first free elections were set five months after the Revolution i.e. in May 1990. The question was who will run in these elections? The first problem that the new multiparty, democratic regime had to sort out was find, in a relatively short period of time, **at least two parties, significant enough to take part in these**

elections. It was important that these new parties were sufficiently balanced from an electoral point of view to give these elections the credibility they needed to solidify the democratic process.

Three possible solutions to the question posed by the democratic electioneering process in the absence of political parties

All former socialist countries faced this conundrum yet, for Romania, this was particularly problematic.

There are three ways in which elections can be organised in the absence of political parties each having short- and long-term political and social consequences.

- a) **Anticommunist parties created instantaneously to oppose the Communist Party that survived the fall of the communist regime.** As the fall of communism took everyone by surprise, the establishment of new political parties in a relatively short period of time was practically impossible. The rapid emergence of new political parties though was favoured by a structural factor that existed in every single ex-communist country with the exception of Romania: the survival of communist parties after the fall of the regime. Thus, anticommunist political forces were motivated to appear in distinct political shapes that could challenge the old party for supremacy. Subsequently, political options differentiated even further. Under the intense pressure of the social and political changes apparent, this type of differentiation included the ex-communist parties that subsequent to the fall changed their political options structurally, evolving in the new international political environment towards left-wing European types of political parties or simply disappearing without a trace.

Romania was unlike any other former socialist, European country. The Communist Party, especially due to the excesses of Ceausescu's former dictatorship, totally disappeared during the Revolution. Thus, a strange structural political and organisational void ensued in the absence of stimuli to favour the emergence of political parties that could coalesce public attitudes in a distinctly anticommunist programme. Conversely, the disappearance of the Communist Party had created a rise in solidarity and the constitution of a profound change in the psyche of the Romanian society towards the Western model. Nevertheless, this very consensus was the major difficulty in the rapid constitution of a plurality of political parties.

- b) **Western style political ideologies/parties.** The establishment of classical political parties after the Western model i.e. social-democrat, socialist, liberal, Christian-democrat, ecologist represented a quite simple solution for rapid political differentiation. The adoption of such a model presented a major advantage: it promoted not so much ideological and political programmes that were adequate for immediate changes as much as fundamental options of the Western capitalist society towards which every ex-socialist country was heading. Western models offered an undeniably efficient differentiating scheme as they provided a period of time in which the new parties could fashion programmes adequate to the transition per se.

Every European, post-communist country used such a solution. Yet, there is however, an important impediment. One wonders how could the new political class actors relocate, in the space of four months, from anticommunist solidarity to becoming interconnected with a multitude of political parties whose programmatic

demarcation was less than clear cut at the beginning of the transition? The technocracy in particular, as the most important human resource for the new political class, was notable by its high degree of solidarity hence, it found difficult dissipating into a multitude of political parties whose message was not differentiated enough for the Romanian society's existing organisational model. Hence, this dissipation was left for other political organisations outside technocracy to attempt with little if any support from the technocracy in return. Inevitably, the mass of technocracy could not split into distinct political parties rapidly and remained relatively homogenous and equally confuse in confronting a multitude of peripheral parties that lacked credible support.

Three major problems prevented the formation of a differentiated political party system such as was the case in Western Europe. Firstly, it was practically impossible to let distinct political and ideological programmes crystallise and, in particular, to make them public for the purpose of shaping public opinion. Secondly, parties established nation-wide would inevitably face the problem of building local and regional support in a relatively short period of time. Technocratic solidarity, at locally, was a further stumbling block against rapid political differentiation. This kind of demarcation was a matter of time. Finally, there is this competition between different groups to adopt the title of a Western party with a certain authority. In Romania, this process came unstuck when a multitude of parties declared themselves as being part of the same family of Western parties. Green parties are but one such example.

c) **First round elections – not on parties, but on individuals.** The urgency of these first free elections did not necessarily require a vote on parties as much as the creation of certain institutions that could underpin democratic mechanisms. Thus, a Parliament was required to generate the new legislation – especially, a new Constitution – and vote in a Government that could manage the country until the adoption of that new Constitution and the subsequent organisation of new elections based on a rather clearer political framework. These first free elections could thus have been organised on the basis of a nominal roll call even if this would have been difficult if not impossible to organise nation-wide. Such a vote could have preserved the existing political situation: an undifferentiated, global consensus would have been the basis for the adoption of a new Constitution and the basic laws safeguarding democracy in any given state.

In fact, despite an interaction between parties that was highly antagonistic, the new legislation was adopted in overall political consensus. It is likely that technocracy representatives i.e. people with a certain prestige in the specialist community as much as the local and national community would have stood in for election even in the absence of a clear political vision. Thus, the Parliament elect might not have had a distinct political vision yet it would have represented a framework allowing this system of political parties to crystallise for elections proper after the adoption of the Constitution. Such a possibility would have been particularly adequate for Romania.

The constitution of political structures in Romania

In Romania, political system constitution occurred differently to the three big models presented before. This was the case due to certain peculiarities that have generated an extremely charged political dynamic with powerful, long-term effects.

The constitution of the National Salvation Front (FSN)

Due to the Communist Party's disappearance during the Revolution, one unique characteristic – in as far as other European countries were concerned – was the constitution of the **National Salvation Front (FSN)** as a political body that would temporarily govern the country, in the power vacuum thus created. The FSN's role was to allow some legislative changes to be made and prepare for new elections. While expressing the technocratic point of view, it promoted a wide yet temporary consensus centred on the common objective of eliminating communist structures while affecting profound changes in the entire Romanian society. FSN was not conceived as a political party that would ultimately compete with other parties for political supremacy as it was meant to cease to exist upon the constitution of normal political structures i.e. the first legislative elections. FSN was the cornerstone for the formation of the **Provisional Council for National Union (CPUN)**, a national decision-making body whose function was to promote legislative, social and economic changes until such a time when elections legitimate institutions were to take over in furthering such changes.

However, the way in which the transition would be made from FSN to a multiparty system remained unclear. In a way, FSN was meant to stimulate the creation of new parties yet, it appears that most FSN leaders, while unreservedly abiding by the rules of the new political system, thought this to be not their main priority.

The emergence of political parties

As I attempted to contend earlier, the disappearance of the Communist Party initiated a flagging process of political party constitution. Technocracy was mainly interested in the changes that were about to take place for whose control it did not need to organise itself in a political party for it already held key positions in the management of the entire society. A political structure of the kind FSN offered was the most convenient political umbrella for it was based on a wide consensus while it confirmed the dominant role it already had.

Contrary to this technocratic vision, other social segments were vitally interested in organising themselves in political parties, as this was their master key to political power. Immediately after the Revolution, a multitude of small parties sprawled into existence in a less than impressive stand against technocracy. The most important of these were the **historical parties**: the National Peasant's Party, the Liberal Party, and the Social-Democrat Party. The historical parties were thus named for they existed before the communists usurped power at the end of the Second World War, and these were immediately re-established in January 1990. To these parties, a multitude of tiny parties invented by adventurers and naïve enthusiasts alike threw itself in the political arena head on, animated by the wealth of political opportunities created by the revolution. It is useless to point out how small their chances were vis-à-vis historical parties.

This sprawling of tiny party-lets as much as the re-appearance of the historical parties provoked popular as much as technocratic consternation. Out of this situation occurred a political imbalance that was to have multiple consequences. The technocratic mass, made up of specialists who had effective power in managing the Romanian society hence enjoying a certain degree of confidence on the part of its population was not in a hurry to either help create new parties nor join any new ones

already created. Moreover, the technocracy had grave reservations as regards the new political parties that represented only small social groups by rapport to the entire community. Thus, new party building occurred outside the technocratic framework and it only helped to further the confidence gap between the two groups. On the one hand there stood the technocracy featuring a certain diffuse solidarity, in charge of managing the society and facing teething troubles, while on the other, these newly established parties.

Technocracy, which was in charge after the Revolution, suddenly found itself in the midst of a frustrating conundrum. The political terrain structured along Western classical divisions – liberal, Christian- and social-democrat – that held the potential for the political division of the technocracy was quickly occupied by the historical parties. Straight away, these parties were quickly embraced by their Western political counterparts thus strengthening their internal and international legitimacy. Consequently, technocracy found itself without a legitimate political terrain where to sow its ideological seeds. This caused more confusion among technocrats and delayed even further the process of political delineation.

What followed was a major political imbalance: on one side, a multitude of political parties lacking significant social support and on the other, a technocratic bulk moving slowly to organise itself politically. This hostile environment added to a perceived lack of credibility on the part of the newly established parties made technocrats even more reluctant to join their ranks.

While representing a radically anticommunist political force via a rather ethical yet politically befuddled programme, historical parties inevitably attracted an important number of morally frustrated people from both the elderly as much as the younger generation that were utterly confused by the chain of events that followed after the Revolution. The rather abstract aspirations of this category of people clashed with the pragmatic approach of the technocracy and looked towards the ideologically radical programmes of the historical parties.

The transformation of the FSN into a political party

It is difficult to establish what was the exact sense of the causal determinism characteristic of that particular moment in time. Nevertheless, by the end of January 1990, Ion Iliescu declares that FSN was to become a political party that would run for the elections.

Such a decision provoked a storm of protests as it represented a grave violation of the principle for which the FSN was created i.e. representing anything but a political structure whose mission had only been one of preparing the forthcoming elections. What was clear though, was that this rapid creation of political parties spurning the political arena in a colourful way yet without attracting significant popular political support had put the FSN in an awkward situation. A good deal of the population, including the technocracy, had adhered on principle to the FSN. This had created a structural problem.

On the one hand, as the FSN did not represent a political party, it could not take part in the forthcoming elections despite the massive popular support it enjoyed. Conversely, the mass of parties that could take part regardless of their minuscule (by comparison) popular support, could have benefited from the absence of the dominant political forces present in the FSN gravitating outside those parties already created. Though far from sufficient, the creation of political parties had helped to homogenise the FSN as many of those who did not share the technocratic vision prevalent chose to

leave the newly formed party. Indeed, the FSN's transformation into a political party, though perceived as morally wrong, was but an extremely effective political move as it expressed the will of some important political forces within. It is most likely that even the founding of a completely new party by such forces that were not physically yet only philosophically engaged and were central to the FSN would have produced a similar result.

The political positioning of the FSN/PDSR

It is difficult to assess beyond ideological disputes the initial reform strategy. Clear enough is that the economic strategy employed by the technocracy that led the country between 1990 and 1996 and, to a degree, even after that was strewn with errors and much confusion. Hence, the economy became stagnant because of a background of reasons ranging from the irrationality inherited from the former regime, a Revolution induced crisis and a lack of significant economic support from abroad. The technocracy's political folding was the result of its failure to identify a reform strategy that would ensure a period of transition without it being accompanied by economic collapse.

FSN and subsequently, PDSR – that followed in spirit and social foundations – did not have a clear enough economic, social and political programme to guide itself from thus banking more on its proven ability to manage a complex economic and social system. It is true that in a relatively short period of time after the Revolution (between February and April 1990) a programme of intent, popularly and in particular, technocratically endorsed was devised. This programme spelled out the transition to a market economy and a Westernly oriented democratic system. While nobody even considered a return to communism, the obsession with an ever-present communist mentality obsessively aired by the historical parties continued to sow the seeds of a strong political confusion.

Against all ideological criticisms, FSN was anything but a party of former party activists. It was not as commonly perceived as much as it identified itself often as a party of the left, of the social-democratic type. FSN/PDSR was always a party of the technocracy, especially from the administration and economy sectors, a party profoundly linked to the state. Right from the beginning, economic technocracy played a significant role. If during the socialist regime economic technocracy was placed under political subordination, after the revolution it took over the state function of presiding over the economy, thus having to confront powerful disintegration phenomena and crises. Its central problem was how to manage the economy so as to re-launch it through reform.

The analysis of the use of budgetary resources offered a pinpoint image of the FSN/PDSR's political orientation while in office. Never once during the transition has its public spending gone towards social areas as it did towards propping up the economy. In fact, GDP percentage wise, its public spending was the lowest of all the countries in transition throughout the region. Financial support for segments stricken by poverty was systematically neglected. The most effective means of support, child benefit, has been downgraded from approximately 9% of the medium wage in 1990, to around 3%. Though between 1991 and 1993 occurred the biggest explosion in the poverty levels, the government was least interested in introducing any form of benefits that might have alleviated the plight of those facing extreme poverty. The Benefits system was only introduced in 1995 more because of the pressures it was facing from the World Bank rather than any true convictions. Because of the way it

was accepted, it was prone to deteriorate rapidly thus becoming extinct in a matter of just a few years.

Financing education and health, which was severely limited during the final years of the communist regime, was maintained at extremely low levels compared to the rest of the countries facing this very same transition. The only Social Benefits programmes that enjoyed relatively better support were those directed towards certain categories of wage earners such as pensioners (ex-employees) and the unemployed (employees made redundant). The argument put forward by the technocracy in favour of under-financing social benefits programmes was that only by supporting the economy was there any likelihood to have a better standard of living for the community. The technocratic principle central to this vision is typically liberal: reform can only be made with sacrifices. In subsidiary, the technocracy was rather receptive to the syndicates' point of view of maintaining work places. The syndicate movement, most powerful in Romania, was an important pressurising factor in favour of saving jobs yet I doubt this was the key factor. In reality, some sort of an alliance occurred between syndicates and the economic technocracy focusing excessively on saving existing factories against the background where any strategy for re-launching the economy was conspicuous through its absence. The massive support given to the state sector simultaneously satisfied both the wage earners and the technocrats' interests.

In fact, this rather confused policy of propping up the economy, aside from the chronic wasting of public resources, was unable to stop the economic free fall and only managed to deal it out on a lengthier period of time, with added costs. Rather than prioritise limited available resources towards the infrastructure while supporting strategic areas of the economy – complementary to supporting those communities that were most at risk from the rapid degradation of the social services and the outburst of poverty – these were wasted on unreformed factories that were poorly managed. If the privatisation of the economy was accepted unreservedly, against the background of a limited offer, economic technocracy sought obsessively, in this new economic climate, to maintain the system it inherited. It was to be expected that the technocracy, which was so inextricably linked to the state sector, was likely to resist a process of privatisation that was destroying the economic system it was still administering. Nevertheless, in time, the process of economic devastation occurred regardless despite huge budgetary commitments in an attempt to prop up the economy.

Technocratic ideology was without a shadow of a doubt geared towards building a Western style capitalist society. State enterprise management representatives who occupied influential positions among the politically active technocracy promoted the logic of economic changes quite forcefully yet strategy errors were the main factor for their having a rather negative effect. On the other hand though, economy technocrats were shielded from the errors in reverse that, between 1997 and 2000, had a devastating effect on the Romanian economy. Judging from this point of view, the technocratic vision was flatly opposed to the historical parties' radicalism. As a technocracy representative, PDSR adopted a pragmatist approach to change as it tried to promote a more organic type of reform. Upon coming to power in 1997, historical parties proved they had no strategy for reform apart from the harmful "privatisation at any cost" doctrine thus proving they had no ability to reform the economy as they had promised they would.

Historical parties

The emergence of the new historical parties

Romania's specificity is that standard European parties were not founded as new parties by groups belonging to the political class that was about to crystallise on a strong technocratic foundation. On the contrary, these were but a reconstitution by their former members of parties disbanded by the communist regime. Hence the reason why these parties appeared in the eyes of public opinion as "historical parties" rather than new, vibrant, modern parties resulting from the political crystallisation of the community.

How can this peculiarity be explained? The explanation offered by this enquiry refers to the disparity between the mass of technocrats and the members of parties disbanded by the communist regime in as far as their ability and will to form political parties was concerned. The disappearance of the principal political adversary – the Communist Party – was a shock that failed to instil a sense of urgency into building political solidarity and moreover, weakened the motivation for political structuring. The only groups that were highly cohesive while animated by a will to constitute themselves into political parties were those made of survivors from these historical parties. Their rapid consolidation against a background of solid international support inhibited further the creation of alternative parties. The re-establishment of these former parties had as effect the creation of a kind of monopoly on European type party structures as the technocracy became but a marginal force. Such a move was to have profound consequences for the entire political process.

New members and founders of the historical parties

The historical parties were reinstated by small groups of ex-members who established a quasi-absolute internal authority. The internal democratic deficit resulting from this type of constitution severely restricted the appeal it may have had on younger people with experience on managing a modern society especially among those without any historical relationship with these former political groups. In the new historical parties young people enrolled too yet normally coming from families with a tradition of belonging to these parties and who had frequently suffered because of that. As it is always the case in exceptional situations like those produced by a revolution, marginal characters attracted by the ideological radicalism professed also joined. Due to their gerontocratic structure, there was a tendency among newcomers to adopt radical attitudes that would prove they were free from communist mentalities hence pass the test that would ultimately see them accepted in the party fold.

Historical parties had a special penchant for intellectuals who were not part of the technocracy per se yet were part of a rather special category of intellectuals such as literary people, essay writers, journalists, philosophers. Most of them were anticommunist intellectuals who had been pushed towards the margins of intellectual life by the old regime. Young people schooled abroad completed their numbers while journalists financed to promote the anticommunist ideology further enhanced their profile. Removed from the daily running of the economy and administration, frustrated by the Romanian society's evolution both pre- and after the Revolution, it is understandable how a relatively reduced section of the non-technocratic intellectuality might have evolved towards a radical ideology thus being pulled closer to the historical parties.

Historical parties' ideology

Right from the start, historical parties were animated by a philosophy based on a radical ideology. Four big themes underpinned this ideology:

- A radical anticommunist attitude as a ruthless reaction against communism rather than articulating a programme of development and change;
- Favouring a policy of *change via the destruction of the modern structures* produced by communism rather than a policy of *change through rectification and development* in the guise of Western modernity;
- Promoting rapid change even if lacking the foundation of a strategy sufficiently articulated; the obsession with hasty reforming had a goal of razing inherited structures to the ground after which to build on that “ground zero” a capitalist society where a return to communism would be impossible to achieve;
- Finally, the preference of reinstating ownership structures abolished by communism some forty years before (retrocession *in integrum*) rather than promoting property structures that would have ensured the economy was kick-started in a modern context.

It is not by chance that the historical parties' programmes centred not so much on constructive themes as it did on those highly destructive i.e. the block exclusion of all institutional accumulations of the last forty years while politically disputing the specialist's competence.

A glimpse into the past reveals the strategic errors made during this period of transition. During the first part of the nineties, it is shocking to note a virtual absence of any public debate on how to cut Romania's coat to suit its cloth. The dominant theme was this rather simplistic idea of change for the sake of changing – the only ideologically charged controversy being about the pace and extent of this much-vaunted change i.e. piecemeal or all at once. The need for reform was so self-evident that it required no further discussions. Moreover, invoking any possible alternative at that particular moment in time meant opening the floodgates to a flurry of ideological accusations. This simplistic schemata was but a desperate attempt to escape communism by any means available even if this involved creating an instrument for spreading suspicions as well as fashioning an effective springboard for unfounded political and ideological accusations laid at the door of the technocracy and its parties.

The **reform** theme, which had become a key element in the political programme of the historical parties, especially after assuming power, expressed a diffuse will for change, which was mostly founded on a concept that was still in its systematic infancy. On the one hand, “reform” represented the rapid and block elimination of all accumulations inherited from the communist regime. On the other, it offered the new government's political programmes some sort of a content however vague this may have been – any change, however vaguely it resembled Western replicas, became yet another “reform” concept. Thus, the reform theme became the favoured whip for criticising technocratic political formations: the lack of reform, the delayed reform, the not sufficiently fast enough reform etc. etc.

The 1997 governance launched itself with great zest into promoting reform in all areas – from education and health to the economy – yet soon, this fervour proved to be no more than amateur improvisation. The rapid privatisation programme was not

guided by any economic strategy whatsoever and it was more of a typical example of how to get rid of an institutional framework it understood little of.

Against technocracy they had a single competitive advantage: a radically anticommunist programme that had been turned into an almost obsession vis-à-vis a somewhat aloof indifference hoisted high by the technocracy, which considered the communist system to be but a stage in modern history, irrevocably confined to a chapter in political textbooks. It could thus be argued that the ideological radicalism displayed by the historical parties was but a manifestation of their chronic lack of experience in the political management of a complex, modern society and, in particular, an extremely effective instrument deployed to compete politically with the technocracy.

Returning to the political, economic and social structures pre-dating the communist take-over yet, without a clear vision of the subsequent changes that have occurred since both in Romania's make-up as much as the world's was the cornerstone of the historical parties' political platform. The only two distinctly positive points in the historical parties' programmes were property restitution (*in integrum*) and the elimination from political life of all those suspected of harbouring communist mentalities. Beyond these two aspects, they had a positively muddled image of how a Western capitalist society might actually be instated while they lacked any strategy for this type of transformation. Hence, their radicalism was but a product of the deficit notable in their political agenda as much as their popularity. The fact that their radicalism had made paroxysm but a figure of speech owes much to the fact that during communism they had been pushed to the margins of society yet now, they were back with a vengeance and a point to prove.

The policy of constantly accusing both technocrats and ordinary people who failed to share the historical parties' take on things of actually being closeted communists was more effective in attracting foreign rather than internal support. It could be argued that their political power was in fact the measure of the population's respect for the West than a true reflection of their actual political power.

Thus, the creation of a political image of extreme polarisation between "true capitalism", "true democracy" and "neo/closeted communism" is not in fact a true reflection of the ideological difference existent in the Romanian society but rather an effect of the imbalance between political forces: a large and diffuse grouping mainly composed of technocrats enjoying popular support yet frightened by the political extremism and the radicalism of a group of historical parties lacking an articulated programme for transforming the Romanian society, with limited popular support internally yet enjoying massive Western support.

The danger coming from the communists/"securitate" (secret police) people

One of the phenomena typical of the transition political processes was the manufacturing of artificial political dangers with historic culpability and catastrophic consequences that had to be unceremoniously censured. The communist/"securitate" (secret police) scare was a central anticommunist theme that was subsequently turned into the "high-jacking of the Revolution" by those who had *stolen*, or *confiscated* it from the masses. In particular, the historical parties had brought forward accusations against the FSN/PDSR of having brought onto the political stage nomenclature communists and ex- (actual?) "securitate" people. The mistrust in political forces alleged to attempt to reinstate communism in Romania who were supposedly the

dominant force in FSN motivated the historical parties in January 1990 to attempt to take political power by force via a coup d'état.

Why did historical parties launch and persist with such accusations? Two factors could offer an answer to this question. Firstly, the punitive radicalism, on the verge of fanaticism, of the political groupings that were victims of the repression dating from the time of the communist take-over. Hence the reason for their insistence that communists and "securitate" people, in particular, had to be exposed and eliminated from political life. Secondly, the furnishing of untold dangers linked to the transition and diffusely located among the ranks of the technocracy were but an expression of the difficulty faced by these parties in securing popular support. Yet, the greatest danger facing the historical parties was coming from the mass of technocrats that had evolved during communism and had become strong because of the competence gained and the position enjoyed in the management of the social system up to that moment in time that constituted its main political adversary.

The emergence of these historical parties was the major factor responsible for creating strong tensions inside the political system. These parties had most forcefully promoted the idea of their being the sole legitimate representatives of anti-communism hence, due to this self appointed characteristic, staking a claim on the wonderland of true democracy. What the historical parties managed to do by putting the rest of the political forces and, in particular, the technocracy, in the pressure cooker of their being the master chefs that would not allow too many cooks to spoil the broth of democracy was to ring every technocratic defensive bell available thus increase its internal cohesion and slow down even further its eventual political differentiation. Politically victimised for allegedly being neo-communist/"securitate", the technocracy, which rightly or wrongly perceived itself as the principal actor competent to enact the necessary social changes, went towards building a party that could defend, support and represent it.

Supported by a large worker and peasant section of the population yet, confused and feeling threatened by the extremist danger posed by the historical parties, the party which symbolised the technocracy (FSN and subsequently, the PDSR) won a categorical victory against the historical parties in 1990 and then again in 1992. Not accidentally, parties representing segments of the technocracy as well as parties that felt threatened by the historical parties' radicalism, such as the Party of the National Union of Romanians (PUNR), the Great Romania Party who, alongside its vision on ethnicity was positively hostile towards the historical parties or, the Socialist Party all founded alliances with the FSN/PDSR.

Unforeseen (in addition to) catastrophic long-term effects of the historical parties' establishment was Romania's international isolation. As the historical parties were perceived by the West as the sole guarantor for a Western friendly, anticommunist regime, they were strongly backed despite their clear deficit of popular support in the hope of underpinning changes considered to be essential in the new international political environment. Moreover, Western 'volunteers' joined the struggle against the parties representing the 'political voice of the majority' and thus managed to block their political acceptance into the political fold for long periods of time.

It is difficult to estimate the measure in which successive governments from 1990 to 1996 promoted or not an adequate reform strategy or whether they manifested or not a firm political will for change. The constant accusations of not having accelerated reform enough or to have slowed it deliberately were discredited by the fiasco of the 1997-2000 by the historical parties trying their hand at governing a

country with a programme based almost entirely on the “acceleration of reform theme”. Though it is difficult to gauge at the very source of this catalogue of errors in the way in which reforms were adopted during the initial stage of the transition, they appear to have been caused by the inevitability of confusions, the technocracy’s limited interests and its yielding to the extremist pressures applied by the historic parties, indiscriminately supported by Western political forces.

Attitudes towards the historical parties

Historical parties had a few trump cards up their sleeve whose credibility was greater in the West than it was over here. At home, public opinion had strong reservations about these parties right from the start. After a period of over forty years that had elapsed from the moment these parties were disbanded by the communists, few of their initial leaders had survived the rigours of age and the severity of life in communist prisons. Furthermore, they were unable to join the ranks of the socialist technocracy. Yet, after the fall of communism, they were the only people who had any valid claim to a political activity past however distant that past may have become by then. Nevertheless, these politicians were practically unknown to a community that had little if any trust in their abilities, as they had been very young politicians at a time of great democratic ambiguity in history i.e. Carol’s dictatorship followed by Antonescu’s and then the war, followed by the Soviet occupation – all of which was unlikely to make the cut for the world’s most impressive CVs. For over forty years, these politicians had been forced to live on the margins of society and their political instincts had undoubtedly been blunted into not much more than nostalgic frustrations by the fact that they were unable to pit their wits against political adversaries for such a long period of time. Long periods of imprisonment followed by peripheral positions both in Romania and the Western society are unlikely to make the ideal frame for political development. Thus, even during the greatest crises in PDSR their popular support was not significant enough.

At the beginning of the transition, for the generation of young adults these parties were but pure history as they lacked any relevance for the Romanian society’s future. By contrast, historical parties’ leaders claimed they were bestowed with authority by history and their unflinching anticommunism rather than political experience as such and popular support. Meanwhile, the West appeared to concord with this rather curious self-appraisal and appeared to be out of touch with the indigenous opinion for rather obscure ideological reasons that had to do with the parties’ *hysterical* anticommunism.

The Western position is understandable for its peculiarity, as it had always sought to overthrow socialism. As soon as the historic fall occurred, its main objective had been to build bridges over the ideological chasm between socialism and capitalism and develop a new international solidarity. Such a political programme appears to have been exacerbated by a secondary factor: a psychological fear against a perceived communist threat, which was rather irrational and not founded on facts. The 1989 revolutions did not appear to allay all fears about a possible risk of the communist system making a surprise come back. Though such fears appeared baseless in the newly liberated countries, it nevertheless offers a credible explanation for the support given to encourage the enactment of radical changes that could not be reversed hence eliminate this perceived risk once and for all. Moreover, Western anticommunist radicalisation gave further justification of the righteousness of its cause in the historic conflict where it had just prevailed.

The Western political forces opting to massively support the historical parties in Romania is explainable via its obsession with a perceived danger of communism making an unexpected volte-face. The historical parties offered a guarantee of anticommunist intransigence much more certain than the technocracy's diffuse grouping. Investing historical parties with absolute confidence, the West transferred a kind of structural suspicion against all their political foes with particular focus on the strongest of them all, the FSN/PDSR.

It is likely that its support was accentuated by the apparent power imbalance. The historical parties reduced popularity vis-à-vis the strength of the parties generated by the technocracy (the 1992 elections saw the four technocracy-representative parties dubbed as the "Red Square" gaining power) gravely worried the West. Moreover, the historical parties banking on Western support refused any kind of political co-operation with the victorious parties. Hence the reason why the West had exerted intense political pressure, by the time of the 1996 elections, insisting on "power alternation" after two comprehensive defeats for its political protégés as a test not so much for the strength and quality of the opposition but as a test for the "quality of democracy" in Romania. This proved to be the decisive argument for the electoral victory of the historical parties eventually.

The failure of the 1997-2000 governance made little but amplify the initial weaknesses manifested by these political formations. The elections demonstrated the historical parties' incapacity to govern through their rather simplistic political programme as much as via the reduced political and technical competency exhibited by their members. The 2000 elections had brought PDSR back in power with its name changed to the Social Democratic Party (PSD) – a party dominated by the technocracy with an opposition even weaker than before.

The relationship between historical parties and technocracy

Right from the start, between the two political blocks was established a relationship of mistrust which had developed rapidly into much tension and open conflict.

As the technocrats occupied management positions in the economic and administrative systems they were rather slow in organising themselves politically. Members of the former political parties were quick to organise themselves politically yet were increasingly frustrated by the fact that after the fall of the communist regime, they were still waiting for a real breakthrough in gaining access to state power. They thought of themselves to be not only victims of the communist regime but the only unremitting fighters against the communist regime and the rightful representatives of real democracy in Romania. Consequently, it was to be expected that the leaders of historical parties sooner or later were to become rather violent against the mass of technocrats who they said was responsible for bringing communism to Romania and continued keeping them far from power. The technocrats, the majority of whom were ex-Communist Party members, were considered by the historical political groups to be co-responsible for the communist regime as much as being closeted *communists* in *mentality*. Paradoxically, many in the second echelon of historical parties' activists had also been members of the Communist Party.

Between technocracy and historical parties there had existed profound differences in terms of their strategic positioning. The historical parties pretended to have a certain monopoly on political competence while the technocracy relied more on their professional competence. The technocrats were positioning themselves

towards Westernised modernisation of the social and economic systems built during socialism while the historical parties considered these systems to be but products of the communist era which they distrusted as a matter of principle and which they were inclined to destroy rather than revamp. The technocracy was positioning itself towards a rapid development towards the future, highly technical and dependent on the promotion of a high degree of social consensus. The historical parties were interested more in the re-establishment of a past that was neither very clearly defined nor was it popularly attractive either: reinstating the monarchy, property retrocession *in integrum* – with the latter having very little value if not acutely adverse effects for the vast majority of the population. The historical parties had chosen to promote a punitive approach towards those who might have, in the past, been involved in some way or another in executive positions during the communist regime while the technocracy kept stressing, in the name of historical rather than personal responsibility, the need for consensus in what regards social development. As far as historical parties were concerned, the objective of attaining social consensus was a rather dangerous objective to have as the attainment of power could only have been achieved via a net separation from technocracy.

In order that the political advantage of their being the inheritors of pre-communist democracy as well as communism's only constant thorn in the back was preserved, the historical parties' leaders had developed a kind of closed, protective system. Specific selection criteria – especially for top party officials – had been introduced: the group holding ultimate authority was made up of elderly politicians who had belonged to these traditional parties; the second criterion, subordinated to the first, concerned background, ancestry and blood ties to such former party members. Such admission rules were anathema to the rules of open competition regulating technocratic parties' membership. Against principles of open competition based mainly on competence and characterised by a high degree of social mobility, the historical parties introduced a rigid and authoritarian system that excluded technocrats from joining on principle. Consequently, historical parties appeared to the technocrats to be but closed political structures to which free access on equal terms was denied.

Due to the historical parties exhibiting grave reservations vis-à-vis the technocracy, they were constantly short of specialists who could run the economy and the administration. Not surprisingly in 1996, during the election campaign, the Democratic Convention (CDR) felt obliged to answer popular fears about it not having any specialists in government i.e. technocrats by bringing some 15000 specialists.

The historical parties v. the workers and the peasants

The ideology of the historical parties was not the workers and the peasants' favourite cup of tea.

The vast majority of the population was more interested in getting the economy back on its feet rather than restoring old properties to their rightful owners. This matter was mostly related to the reconstitution of properties nationalised by the communist regime. It is true to say that a larger segment of the population was interested in the latter. Yet, for the majority of the urban population that had moved to the city from their village back then, there was nothing to be gained from this historical parties' priority objective but becoming an unlikely victim of this punitive type of justice.

The workers were tied to the industry – their problem was not necessarily privatisation. In practical terms, they had never had that feeling of owning the economy. Who the factory belonged to was not important; what was important though was that there was a functional economy that could offer decent jobs and wages. Hence the reason why their interest was focused on enterprise management. The historical parties though were, in turn, interested about the possible retrocession of the ownership of these factories and enterprises. The workers trusted the technocracy. The eventual previous owners (in fact, nationalised enterprises had long ceased to exist) were considered by workers as people with a serious deficit of legitimacy as much as competence and resources.

The peasants had again become owners of their land while the great landowners might have reclaimed part of the property redistributed via the agrarian reform that followed the end of the Second World War. Yet, the historical parties' programmes had no solutions for the vast majority of the peasant population for whom the retrocession had largely been effected.

A new historical cycle

The 2000 elections have closed a long political cycle. The historical parties, run by politicians who had been formed before the communist regime came to power have, for all intents and purposes, disappeared as a result of their failure to govern. The National Peasant Christian and Democrat Party, the head of the coalition government between 1997-2000 suffered a humiliating defeat and ceased to be represented in Parliament. The loss of elections produced successive splits and its current chances of re-emergence remain minimal. The Social Democratic Party united with the PDSR. The National Liberal Party, probably due to the fact that from the very beginning it had gone through multiple break ups presented a much more open and flexible social and political structure. After loosing the elections alongside the coalition of which it was part of, it was the only historical party sufficiently strong to survive because of its constantly changing its leadership team.

The new PSD, winner of the last elections, is about to undergo profound changes of strategy and programme. Because of economic imbalances, notably those in the state sector, economic technocracy will continue to have an important though diminishing role in governance. What is most likely though is that the process of assimilating the social-democratic model will increase. The competition with the other Social Democrat Party (PD), who may move towards the liberal option soon, forces it, by virtue of the next elections at least, more and more towards social democratic positions.