

PART II

The demand side:
Parties and their membership

Cultivating large membership rolls: The Romanian case

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Introduction

The literature concerning the post-communist parties is replete with debates over the resemblance between western European parties' cartelisation and the post-communist parties' evolution. The latter were *ab origine* depicted as being less part of the society and more of the state apparatus. On the one hand, this *genetic* feature constrained post-communist parties to adapt to a low level of trust and participation and, on the other, to be highly dependent on the resources provided by the state. As the cartel party model postulates, the major post-communist parliamentary parties had framed specific patterns of collusion between themselves and the state, the subsequent cartelisation influencing both the party competition and their organisational structures.

Consequently, 'in comparative terms, central and eastern European party membership levels remained low. Central European parties were estimated to have enrolled 1-4% of the adult population'¹. Nevertheless, recent studies have identified heterogeneous patterns of party organisation and different perceptions of their membership². Spirova emphasised the exceptionally high level of party membership

¹ P.G. LEWIS, 'Political Parties', in S. WHITE, J. BATT and P.G. LEWIS, *Developments in Central and East European Politics*, New York, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2003, p. 165.

² P.G. LEWIS and R. GORTAT, 'Models of Party Development and Questions of State Dependence in Poland', *Party Politics*, 1/4, 1995, p. 599-608; A. SZCZERBIAK, 'Testing Party Models in East-Central Europe. Local Party Organisation in Postcommunist Poland', *Party Politics*, 5/4, 1999, p. 525-537; A. SZCZERBIAK, 'New Polish Political Parties as Membership Organisations', *Contemporary Politics*, 7/1, 2001, p. 57-69.

in Bulgaria³. Similar to the abovementioned analysis, the Romanian parties' figures pinpoint particularly good health in terms of raw membership.

In order to assess potential explanations for the Romanian *cas à part*, there are two major caveats: (1) the differences encountered between the membership of parliamentary parties and the myriad of small parties officially registered and (2) the substantial decrease in membership figures officially registered in 2000 and 2007.

Our analysis starts with these two general considerations and is aimed at going beyond the general figures and static observations in order to identify the reasons and consequences of cultivating large membership rolls in contemporary Romania. It is our stance that, while contemporary western parties are less likely to be interested in recruiting members, the analysis of the Romanian case generates new insights into the relevance of increasing membership during the party institutionalisation process. Thus, this paper focuses on the articulation of party membership during Romanian post-communism by scrutinising several factors that can explain the membership rolls as well as their variation.

The general framework of analysis of the Romanian membership rolls

What is a party member in the Romanian case?

A starting point of our examination of the Romanian membership issue concerns the attempt to answer an age-old question: 'How do we define a party member?'. As emphasised by Duverger, 'the reply varies according to each party: each holds to a conception of membership which is peculiar to it'⁴. This is indeed the case for the Romanian political landscape. The extent to which members declare their agreement with the ideological programme of the party or actively take part in the party organisation is still unclear. The Romanian party member is an Unidentified Functioning Object⁵.

If one is to be considered a party member according to the payment of a subscription fee, it would then be nearly impossible to assess the dimensions of the membership rolls in Romania. With the exception of the agrarians, the parties do not provide any information about the amount and the payment of subscriptions. In 2002, of the 190,355 PNTCD members, only 70,165 paid their dues (36.8%)⁶. Recently, the PSD leader emphasised that the party's MEPs are supposed to pay membership fees as elected representatives. More specifically, they are under the obligation to contribute to the party with a percentage of their salary (with €500 per month in the case of the MEPs). There is no further information about the regular payment of this financial contribution. Thus, the relevance of the members in the Romanian parties is only indirectly proven by various surveys that have scrutinised the political elites⁷.

³ M. SPIROVA, 'Political Parties in Bulgaria. Organisational Trends in Comparative Perspective', *Party Politics*, 11/5, 2005, p. 601-622.

⁴ M. DUVERGER, *Political Parties*, London, University Paperbacks, 1965, p. 61.

⁵ Based on regular surveys, only 3% of Romanians declare being members of a party. These figures are in strong contrast with the parties' official rolls. There is, thus, a public 'denial' of the membership card due to the parties' image deficit.

⁶ *PNTCD suna adunarea*, Internal Document, 2002.

⁷ See for example L. ȘTEFAN, *Patterns of Political Recruitment*, Bucharest, Ziua, 2004.

These observations are related to the upper level of the party strata but they do provide information about a general pattern of party organisation that relies on the membership card and not exclusively on 'quality' and 'selection'. The following section presents the legal framework and the party statutes in order to provide some insight into the general definition of a party member in the Romanian context.

What do the legislators think about the party members?

At national level, the legislative framework imposed a specific pattern of organisation based on broad social inclusion. In the early 1990s, interest in the membership issue was very low and the 1990 law required a minimum of 251 members. In line with this porous system, by the end of 1991, 128 parties were registered and, one year later, 151 parties could be counted. Starting with the 1992 elections, the imposition of a progressively increased electoral threshold (3% in 1992 and 1996 and 5% in 2000 and 2004) cut down the number of parliamentary parties.

Although regionally this is a common pattern of simplifying an overcrowded parliamentary arena⁸, Romania's specificity lies in combining high electoral thresholds and tough rules for party registration. Thus, Law no. 27/1996 required a minimum of 10,000 members. This requirement induced a major decrease in terms of officially registered parties. At the beginning of 1996, 200 parties were registered. On the eve of the national legislative elections of the same year, only 75 parties were still active. Immediately after the 2000 national elections, the liberals backed a new legal text in an attempt to institutionalise broad membership in Romania. Initially, the law proposal required 50,000 members, but after a presidential boycott⁹, the final text cut the initial requirement in half. Currently, 25,000 members residing in at least 18 administrative departments (a minimum of 700 members per department) are required by law no. 14/2003. Notwithstanding this high legal threshold, 64 parties were still officially registered by November 2004. Hence, the law demonstrates the deep collusion among the parliamentary parties which tend to raise obstacles regularly for newcomers and protect their share of benefit from being in office and thus from being gatekeepers of the state assets.

What do the political parties think about it?

From an endogenous perspective, the Romanian political parties adopted different strategies concerning the possibility for citizens to join the party organisation. These basic criteria are essential in order to understand the party position as regards the cooption of new members. The degree of inclusiveness of one party (which decreases

⁸ S. BIRCH, F. MILLARD, K. WILLIAMS, and M. POPESCU, *Embodying Democracy: Electoral System Design in Post-Communist Europe*, 'One Europe or Several?', Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

⁹ The proposal encountered strong criticisms. President Iliescu joined the criticisms and vetoed the law. In parallel, Pro Democratia, endorsed by several other NGOs, sent the MPs a public letter criticizing a law that 'limits and even cancels (...) the right to assemble in political parties and the freedom of choice' ('Scrisoare 18 noiembrie 2002', Anexa 3, Raportul *Oficiului pentru Institutii Democratice si Drepturile Omului al OSCE privind legea partidelor politice din Kazahstan*, Warsaw, 23 July 2002).

with the number of conditions that one person should fulfil in order to become a party member) varies across parties and time. The statutory provisions unveil different models of conceiving the affiliation of new members. Left-wing and right-wing parties seem to develop specific types of behaviour which are not related to their ideological affiliation.

The PSD and the PNL have adopted restrictive sets of conditions for party affiliation. Given its position of successor, the PSD introduced in its statutes different stipulations that could be seen as screening mechanisms in accordance with the legitimising discourse adopted by the party leaders after 1989. Therefore, the citizens who wanted to become party members should not have been active against the revolution or supporters of the former communist regime. The future member also had to possess a clean record concerning his/her previous behaviour in terms of voicing extremist views. Interestingly, in 2001, the PSD also introduced a new provision which limited the recruitment process to a certain extent. The party statutes specified that in order to become a party member one should have the recommendation of a person who had already joined the party (Art. 5, 2001). The same statutes introduced the category of the party supporters (Art. 8, 2001), thus creating the possibility to be active close to the party without becoming a full member. Meanwhile, the PNL added new restrictions in 2003 that tried to reinforce the territorial branches. From 2003, party affiliation was organised within the local party branch of the applicant's residence, thereby linking the new members to a specific local organisation.

At the other end of the continuum of inclusiveness, one can identify two other parties: the PD and the UDMR. In these cases, only a written declaration of loyalty was required in order to join the party organisation. In addition to this, the lack of further statutory specifications can be confusing. The PRM was born as a 'political tribune' supported by the readers of the homonym newspaper¹⁰ and, consequently, the PRM statutes tend to establish an equal treatment for regular members and sympathisers.

Thus, the differences in representations concerning the process of affiliation and the definition of party membership can be placed on a general axis that starts with a *restrictive definition of the party member* (a member is the person who fulfils a list of criteria and who is accepted by the party organisation) and ends with a *broad definition implying only a voluntary dimension* (a party member is a person who fulfils only the legal requirements and wants to become a member of the party). At first glance, the PSD statutes suggest that membership should be characterised by personalised group cohesion, whereas the PNL seem to be more inclined towards a pragmatic approach to membership and its role in building solid local organisations, and the other parties prefer rather wide recruitment as a general reflection of their openness to the electorate. These differences are however the result of specific developments of the post-communist parties, and they do not automatically establish the membership rolls.

¹⁰ In the early 1990s, the newspaper's circulation was 600,000 copies (A. MUNGIU, *România după '89. Istoria unei neînțelegeri*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1995, p. 86) and in 2000 it was estimated that there were around 400,000 readers (G. VOICU, *Zei cei rai: cultura conspiratiei în România postcomunistă*, Bucharest, Polirom, 2000, p. 212).

Romanian membership rolls

Starting in the 1990s, all western democracies experienced a downward trend in their membership figures¹¹. By putting together the erosion of traditional social boundaries, economic growth, the role of mass media, the professionalization of political parties, their office seeking behaviour, their financial dependence on the state, scholars emphasised ‘a *process* of organisational adaptation’¹². In this context, recent studies have demonstrated that ‘increased electoral size greatly inhibits the ability of parties to recruit and retain members’¹³. In addition, there is strong evidence for a partisan dealignment linked both to the lack of incentives for a better educated electorate to integrate classic forms of political participation, and to the development of various citizens’ groups active as alternative forms of interest articulation¹⁴. In parallel, the progressive decline of membership figures is associated with the interpenetration between parties and state, while parties tend to look for alternative sources of financing to the direct old-fashioned membership subscriptions¹⁵. Consequently, in both new and old democracies, parties were portrayed as becoming ‘public utilities’¹⁶. Within this framework, the post-communist parties are considered ‘almost by definition, more open and available’ to develop homologous patterns of behaviour similar to the cartel party in western democracies¹⁷. A mass membership model was excluded for the post-communist realities¹⁸. As a result, the narrow membership basis is portrayed as the basic characteristic for these parties ‘entrapped’ within the post-communist state.

¹¹ R.S. KATZ and P. MAIR, ‘Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy. The Emergence of the Cartel Party’, *Party Politics*, 1/1, 1995, p. 5-28; A. TAN, ‘Party Change and Party Membership Decline. An Exploratory Analysis’, *Party Politics*, 3/3, 1997, p. 363-377; P. MAIR and I. VAN BIEZEN, ‘Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies, 1980-2000’, *Party Politics*, 7/1, 2001, p. 5-21; I. VAN BIEZEN, *Political Parties in New Democracies. Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2003.

¹² R. HARMEL, ‘Party Organisational Change: Competing Explanations?’, in R.K. LUTHER and F. MULLER-ROMMEL (eds), *Political Parties in the New Europe. Political and Analytical Challenges*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 12.

¹³ S. WELDON, ‘Downsize my Polity? The Impact of Size on Party Membership and Member Activism’, *Party Politics*, 12/4, 2006, p. 475.

¹⁴ R.J. DALTON and M.P. WATTENBERG (eds), *Parties without Partisans. Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹⁵ R.J. DALTON, I. McALLISTER, and M.P. WATTENBERG, ‘The Consequences of Partisan Dealignment’, in R.J. DALTON and M.P. WATTENBERG (eds), *Parties without Partisans. op. cit.*, p. 37-63.

¹⁶ I. VAN BIEZEN, ‘Political Parties as Public Utilities’, *Party Politics*, 10/6, 2004, p. 701-722.

¹⁷ P. MAIR, *Party System Change. Approaches and Interpretations*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997.

¹⁸ P. KOPECKY, ‘Developing Party-Organisations in East-Central Europe. What Type of Party is Likely to Emerge?’, *Party Politics*, 1/4, 1995, p. 515-534; J. TOOLE, ‘Straddling the East-West Divide: Party Organisation and Communist Legacies in East Central Europe’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 55/1, 2003, p. 101-118; R.J. DALTON and I. McALLISTER, ‘Political Parties and Political Development. A New Perspective’, *Party Politics*, 13/2, 2007, p. 139-140.

According to the hypotheses in the literature, the Romanian post-communist parties were supposed to follow a similar pattern of partisan dealignment. Still, surprisingly, not only did the Romanian parties secure constant and impermeable control over the state, but they also maintained important membership levels. Indeed, at the turn of the century, Romania reports high membership figures¹⁹ and establishes a divergent pattern from what is regularly portrayed as a general tendency in Europe.

Based on the official data gathered in Table 1, the 2003 M/E ratio of 10.6% places Romania at a top position in Europe, immediately after Austria with a ratio of 17.7%²⁰. Still, these rough percentages are cut in half if we take into account the parliamentary parties exclusively. Indeed, in this case, the M/E ratio falls to just over 5%. The high discrepancy between the membership figures of parliamentary parties and the global figures related to the officially registered parties abruptly diminishes in 2007. The M/E ratio for the parliamentary parties falls to 4.3%, while the overall percentage indicates a ratio of 6.7%. More specifically, based on the figures of the Official Parties' Register, from 2003 to 2007, raw membership decreased by 636,060 members and, within this framework, parliamentary parties lost 124,994 members. This decreasing trend mainly concerns the opposition parties; the Social democrats lost 95,365 members, and the populists, 98,279. Despite being in power, the PD also registered a loss of 62,461 members. The only exception concerns the Liberals with an increase of 42,949 members.

Given these intriguing findings, several caveats have to be mentioned. As in the western cases, in compiling the raw figures (M) for the Romanian case, access to official reports is difficult and they may not be very accurate. External checking is difficult since parties are highly reticent in providing information about this issue. As regard other data provided by the political parties, the situation is even more ambiguous. For example, the PSD declared very different membership rolls for almost the same period, with a 50% increase in its members between 2000 and 2001²¹. The

¹⁹ There are three basic measures according to which the membership issue can be analysed. First, there is a simple raw membership count (M), 'a measure which clearly captures an important aspect of the problem, especially from the perspective of individual parties' (R.S. KATZ and P. MAIR, 'The Membership of Political Parties in European Democracies, 1960-1990', *European Journal of Political Research*, 22/3, 1992, p. 330). The very same measure is a source of weakness when applied to cross-national comparisons, being strongly linked to the size of each individual country. Nevertheless, M has a major explanatory capacity for the differences between parties from the same national environment. The second common measure is the ratio of party members to party voters (M/V), 'a ratio which is often cited as an indicator of penetration or encapsulation' (R.S. KATZ and P. MAIR, *op. cit.*, p. 331). Within a competition based on complex electoral alliances, the M/V ratio has a questionable relevance as citizens do not clearly cast their votes for an individual party or as certain fragments do not register immediately (M. SPIROVA, *op. cit.*, p. 607). Given these limitations, this paper opted for 'a measure which controls for the size of the overall national electorate rather than for each party's own vote, and which transforms the raw members into a ratio of that electorate (M/E)' (R.S. KATZ and P. MAIR, *op. cit.*, p. 331).

²⁰ P. MAIR and I. VAN BIEZEN, *op. cit.*, p. 9, 11, 15, 16.

²¹ This figure has been double-checked with the PSD 2004 report *Raport despre activitatea 2001-2004*, Congresul PSD, Bucharest, 22 April 2005.

PSD reports indicate that from the 2000 electoral campaign PSD became interested in developing a stable organisation²². In addition, in particular cases such as that of the UDMR, there are some artificial effects regarding the membership rolls which are determined by institutional arrangements. In line with procedures implied by Government Decree no. 90/1992 for Hungarian Minorities abroad and Law LXII of 2001 on Hungarians living in neighbouring countries, the UDMR was transformed into the manager of the registration process for the Hungarian minority in Romania. It therefore generated an overlap between the Law LXII of 2001 registers and the UDMR membership rolls. This exogenous institutional factor induced a rapid increase in the UDMR membership figures, and the alliance is currently portrayed as the second biggest political organisation in Romania (2.7% of registered voters)²³.

Table 1. Romanian parties membership figures, 2003-2007 (official data)

Officially registered parties	2003		2007	
	M	M/E	M	M/E
Social Democratic Party (PSD)	385,481	2.18	290,116	1.58
Great Romania Party (PRM)	201,827	1.14	103,548	0.57
Democratic Party (PD)	148,922	0.84	86,461	0.47
Romanian Humanist Party (PUR)	95,314	0.54	90,663	0.49
National Liberal Party (PNL)	73,185	0.41	116,134	0.63
Private Party	65,994	0.37	<i>Became Justice Force</i>	
Popular Party from Romania	65,000	0.37	26,068	0.14
Socialist Labour Party (PSM)	61,052	0.34	<i>Fusion with PSD</i>	
National Peasants Party Christian Democrat (PNTCD)	56,163	0.32	35,602	0.19
PPCD	56,163	0.32	NA	
National Unity Party (PUNR)	54,402	0.31	<i>Merger with PUR</i>	
Retired and Social Protection Party	50,000	0.28	38,836	0.21
Romanian Green Fed.	44,348	0.25	<i>Fusion with AP</i>	
United Socialist Party	44,081	0.25	<i>Merger</i>	
Green Party	40,867	0.23	26,034	0.14
Socialist Party of the National Reconstruction	35,469	0.20	<i>Disappeared</i>	
Romanian Green Party (PER)	34,810	0.20	28,705	0.16

²² This chronological perspective is further supported by an important shift within PSD identity. This shift is explained by the PSD acceptance within the IS and PES and its return to power in 2000. Once its legitimacy was established internationally, PSD focused on consolidating its social-democratic programme and, consequently, its organisation. The membership rolls increased from 304,713 in 2000, to 694,654 in 2001. From 2002 onwards, a slight decrease is visible: 659,013 members in 2002, 628,243 in 2003, and 608,161 in 2004. At the same time, the party openly declared its interest in enhancing the organisational infrastructures (professional staff, relation with the trade unions, etc.).

²³ The UDMR is not legally registered as a party and the legal threshold does not apply to it. Additionally, UDMR members can be members of another party simultaneously since the alliance is not registered as such. 'Udmeristii pot fi si membri ai altor partide', *Realitatea Romaneasca*, 17 January 2007. The UDMR membership figures are not summed to the officially registered parties.

<i>Officially registered parties</i>	2003		2007	
	<i>M</i>	<i>M/E</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M/E</i>
Popular Action	33,365	0.19	NA	NA
Romanian Labour Party	32,657	0.18	<i>Merger</i>	
Union for Romania's Reconstruction	32,380	0.18	<i>Merger with PNTCD</i>	
New Generation's Party (CD-2006)	32,000	0.18	92,499	0.51
Socialist Party from Romania	31,292	0.18	28,187	0.15
New Democracy Party (Ecologist Alternative)	31,041	0.18	26,588	0.15
PSD Titel Petrescu	29,743	0.17	29,503	0.16
Romanian Youth Party	28,440	0.16	NA	NA
PNL Câmpeanu	28,391	0.16	<i>Fusion with PNL</i>	
Christian Popular Party	27,696	0.16	<i>Disappeared</i>	
National Christian Democrat Party	26,138	0.15	29,031	0.16
Christian Democrat Party	25,712	0.15	NA	NA
Liberal Democratic Party (PLD) ²⁴	NONE	-	66,872	0.37
National Initiative Party (PIN)	NONE	-	25,941	0.14
National Anti-totalitarian Party Romanian Reconstruction	NONE	-	26,844	0.15
Socialist Alliance Party	NONE	-	36,517	0.20
Democratic Force	NONE	-	31,724	0.17
Total	1,871,933	10.58	1,235,873	6.75
<i>Total (parliamentary parties)</i>	<i>904,729</i>	<i>5.11</i>	<i>779,735</i>	<i>4.26</i>

Source: The National Official Registry of Political Parties. For the dimension of the electorate, the number of registered voters at the 2000 and 2004 elections was used. For 2007, the total (parliamentary parties) includes the PIN and PLD members.

While different data emphasise the high relevance of membership in the Romanian arena, they also testify to an accentuated decreasing trend from 2006 onwards. What are the explanations behind this unclear situation?

Explanatory factors for the Romanian membership rolls

The previous section uncovered the eclectic nature of the definition of a party member in the Romanian context and important variations within the post-communist developments of the Romanian membership rolls. The next section therefore proposes to scrutinise the possible factors leading to the high and volatile party membership in this particular case. Three main explanations are presented: the political context (the historical legacies and their impact upon the relationship between state and parties), the regulatory framework regarding party membership and party finance, and internal organisation dynamics.

²⁴ At the beginning of 2008, the PLD merged with the PD and formed the PDL. The newly emerged party listed the same number of members as the PD had previously.

From the communist to the post-communist state

The political changes of the 1980s have not only dismantled the communist regime but also the remains of the state that embodied it. In such circumstances, the crucial point is that under the *Ancien Régime*, the Communist Party had an effective monopoly on legally acceptable political activity, and the state and the party were deeply intertwined. Characteristically, there were neither concrete boundaries between the two institutions nor real patterns of representation for the citizenry. In addition, the fusion between state and party was exercised to the benefit of the party rather than the state apparatus²⁵. Specifically, the growth in power of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) was in fact the story of a limited, subordinated state. This pattern allowed Linz and Stepan to consider the Romanian case as an example of sultanism where the distinction between the regime/party and the state was blurred in the name of a cult of personality. In parallel, the PCR's initial lack of legitimacy and members induced an increased focus on the strategies for mass enrolment. From 1,000 members in the early 1940s, the PCR rapidly gathered 834,600 members in the 1950s and 1,518,000 at the end of the 1960s²⁶. By the end of the 1980s, the PCR membership was estimated at 33% of the total employed population in Romania, gathering 3.7 million workers²⁷. These figures capture the significant size of the PCR membership: 'four times more members than the communist parties of Hungary and Poland and almost three times more members than the Bulgarian one'²⁸. At the same time, these figures provide the analysis with a feeling of *déjà-vu*. Finally, the PCR organisational patterns could be encompassed as an indirect explanation for contemporary Romanian politics both in terms of parties' interest in large membership numbers and the members' reasons to join them.

Importantly, at regional level, 'the weakness of the communist state left its successor open to predation'²⁹. Grafted on this weakness of the post-communist state, the characteristics of the previous communist regimes influenced the shape of the post-communist institutions and their susceptible degree of politicisation. In line with this argument, the party competition provides a further explanatory factor. Specifically, the Romanian party competition has been characterised by a strong polarisation based on an *out out* principle. Subsequently, the party or the coalition of parties in power enjoyed a complete monopoly over the state assets. From this perspective, it is noteworthy that while the literature sees contemporary parties as 'public utilities'³⁰, the Romanian post-communist reality does not fit this description.

²⁵ J. BLONDEL, 'Party Government, Patronage and Party Decline in Western Europe', in R. GUNTHER, J.R. MONTERO, and J. LINZ (eds), *Political Parties. Old Concepts and New Challenges*, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 244.

²⁶ G. IONESCU, *Comunismul in România*, Bucharest, Litera, 1994.

²⁷ C.A. STOICA, 'Once upon a Time There Was a Big Party: The Social Bases of the Romanian Communist Party (Part I)', *East European Politics and Society*, 19/4, p. 687.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 712.

²⁹ A. GRZYMALA BUSSE, 'Political Competition and the Politicisation of the State in East Central Europe', *Comparative Political Studies*, 36/10, 2003, p. 1127.

³⁰ Parties in the newer democracies are highly dependent on the state but, simultaneously, they control key resources of the state. I. VAN BIEZEN and P. KOPECKY, 'The State and the Parties:

The Romanian state is portrayed as the *parties' utility*. Regional commonly shared reasons support this observation. First, the parties' genesis preceded the state and they designed the state to be pervasive to their influence. Second, there is an unbalanced relationship between the parties and the state linked both to the original emphasis on parties as core foundations of the new political system and to the lack of credibility of the previous capillary-state. Within this framework, the dismantlement of the broad communist state created the basis for large benefits for those parties in power.

Specifically, in the early 1990s, the political structure in power, i.e. the National Salvation Front (FSN), quashed all its competitors and fully benefited from its political hegemony. The deconstruction of the wealthy communist state created opportunities for a capillary-system of patronage³¹. The political competition, dominated by the FSN, allowed no room for contestation. Additionally, the FSN created a reward mechanism for those parties supporting its position and gave them preferential access to the state assets. An unwritten rule has been established since, and rival parties reproduced the same behaviour and cooperated for their own benefit. The collusion between the major parties or the logic of the 'closed eye'³² granted the system with stability since all the parties were equally valued as potential stepping stones to political and public offices³³ and, thus, provided attractive incentives for joining a party³⁴. Joining a party is therefore an issue of status as well as an increased opportunity for economic/professional benefits: 'Scandals and 'shady deals' involving parties occur first and foremost because these parties or some of their members are able to exploit the public bodies'³⁵. Party patronage and clientelist relations – part of the communist heritage – converged in order to ensure political parties their necessary political support.

It should, however, be noted that from 2000 onwards, the mechanisms started to change. Initially encompassed as the architects of the post-communist state and, thereby, promoters of a pervasive institutional design, the Romanian political parties

Public Funding, Public Regulation and Rent-Seeking in Contemporary Democracy', *Party Politics*, 13/2, 2007, p. 251.

³¹ As illustrated by I. VAN BIEZEN and P. KOPECKY, *op. cit.*, p. 241, 'access to patronage typically provides party leaders with the means to build and maintain party organisations through the distribution of selective incentives to party supporters in exchange for organisational loyalty'.

³² M. DOBRY, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1986.

³³ For instance, a high-ranking PNL leader (Patriciu) offered his financial sponsorship both to his party and to its main opponent, the PSD, on the occasion of the 2004 electoral campaign. This ambiguity has to be linked to his various lawsuits brought before the court under different legislatures. Therefore, the best financial investment for an entrepreneur such as Patriciu is to seek political protection whatever the political majority. The politicisation of the state provides the ideal background for these strategies.

³⁴ Following a pork barrel procedure, the leader of the Conservatives openly promised financial help for several mayors in exchange for their adhesion to his party. One of these mayors symbolically declared: 'Who helps me solve this problem (water circuit), who gives me money, there I register', 'Dan Voiculescu vrea sa isi cumpere primar', *Gandul*, 15 April 2006.

³⁵ J. BLONDEL, in R. GUNTHER, J.R. MONTERO, and J. LINZ (eds), *Political Parties. Old Concepts and New Challenges*, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 234.

have progressively lost their hold on the state. This mutation, still in progress, is linked on the one hand to a broader process of compliance with the EU rules, implying stronger requirements in terms of transparency and, in more general terms, with the rules of good governance.

Legal arrangements and party financing

Two main stages in the evolution of the post-communist parties can be depicted in the Romanian case. During the early 1990s, for the most part, parties had to invent *ex nihilo* a programmatic identity, a territorial organisation, and the subsequent mechanisms of internal decision-making. In parallel to the dismantlement of the communist regime and the (re)discovering of the political competition, Decree no. 8/1989 deals primarily with the definition of a political party and its legal requirements. In a top-down perspective, the proto post-communist parties are created as agencies through which groups of elites participate in politics and interact with the state, ultimately attempting to create a territorial organisation and to attract members. The party programmes and party elites came first. The unity of the parties was mainly granted by their small size and the practical advantages of being in power. Significantly, their legitimacy was less connected with popular involvement and more dependent on the visibility of the leaders.

As a direct consequence, extensive membership was not a primary requirement for the early 1990s Romanian post-communist parties. In fact, most of the parties were parliamentary creations, the supremacy of the leaders being embodied firstly in the party in office. The input of the party on the ground into the internal balance of power was to be defined. In brief, while in the traditional format, parties provide the essential linkage between the citizens and the state, and in the post-communist arena, the parties were the architects of the state and their primary function was the legitimisation of the new institutional framework rather than the representation of societal interests. As a result, the post-communist state used to be the first constituency for the parties.

Once the institutional framework and the basis for the legal functioning of the parties were established, it became essential for them to develop a basis of political personnel as one of the dimensions of the institutionalisation process. The role of the grassroots in the organisation provided the party with both legitimacy and territorial stabilisation. The 1996 law on parties settled the public funding of parties and their institutionalisation entered a new dimension. Members were assessed not only in terms of their electoral loyalty but also in terms of supplementary resources for the party. In addition, the members were regularly involved in the mechanisms of the internal balance of power at the level of party organisations. While the creation phase is evaluated in terms of the linkage between parties and the state, the institutionalisation phase concerned primarily the linkages between parties and their organisations. The members were in pole position. Still, both theoretically and empirically, the difficulty lies in the financial relevance of party members, especially from the demand-side perspective. In Romania, party funding does not rely mainly on membership size but rather on electoral performances, which tends to reinforce the existing parliamentary parties. Note should be taken that there is no coherent information about the collection of fees in Romanian parties. Still, subscriptions are declared to be a major resource

for parties, representing 43.6% of the total income for 2003 and 2004, while, for the same period, the state subsidies only represent 15.4%. This observation diverges from the previous opinion on the topic, stating that membership dues have never been an important source of party revenue in Romania³⁶.

Table 2. Membership fees as a % of parties' total income (RON, 2003 & 2004)³⁷

<i>Political Parties</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>State subsidies</i>	<i>Membership fees</i>	<i>Total income</i>	<i>Subsidies as % of the total income</i>	<i>Membership fees as % of the total income</i>
PUR	2003	443,231.1	226,097.8	834,924.4	53.09	27.08
	2004	443,231.2	863,512	2,523,590.6	17.56	34.22
	Total	886,462.3	1,089,609.8	3,358,515	26.39	32.44
PSD	2003	2,266,310.2	7,256,351.5	12,939,589.8	17.51	56.08
	2004	2,266,310.2	25,311,877.8	41,580,816.5	5.45	60.87
	Total	4,532,620.4	32,568,229.3	54,520,406.3	8.31	59.74
PD	2003	812,026.5	212,709.7	2,277,459.2	35.65	9.34
	2004	812,026.5	1,099,322.4	5,197,553	15.62	21.15
	Total	1,624,053	1,312,032.1	7,475,012.2	21.73	17.55
PNL	2003	1,125,094.6	491,497.1	2,480,064	45.37	19.82
	2004	1,125,094.6	1,555,783.9	8,408,173.9	13.38	18.50
	Total	2,250,189.2	2,047,281	10,888,237.9	20.67	18.80
PRM	2003	1,636,392.6	382,110.2	2,255,311.4	72.56	16.94
	2004	1,636,392.6	1,104,708.3	5,236,344.9	31.25	21.10
	Total	3,272,785.2	1,486,818.5	7,491,656.3	43.69	19.85
RMDSZ	2003	746,945	567,169	2,857,472.4	26.14	19.85
	2004	746,945	728,626.9	4,622,350.7	16.16	15.76
	Total	1,493,890	1,295,795.9	7,479,823.1	19.97	17.32
Total	2003	7,030,000	9,135,935.3	23,644,821.2	29.73	38.64
Total	2004	7,030,000.1	30,663,831.3	67,568,829.6	10.40	45.38
Total		14,060,000.1	39,799,766.6	91,213,650.8	15.41	43.63

Beyond the general account, there are strong variations. Still, roughly speaking, two categories of membership fees can be distinguished, i.e. in non-electoral

³⁶ S.D. ROPER, 'The Influence of Romanian Campaign Finance Laws on Party System Development and Corruption', *Party Politics*, 8/2, 2002, p. 175-192.

³⁷ 'Anexa: Situatia veniturilor si cheltuielilor in perioada 2003-2004 inregistrate de partidele politice verificat', *Raport privind rezultatele controlului efectuat conform legii nr. 43:2003, la partidele politice, vizand finantarea acestora in perioada 2003-2004*, Curtea de Conturi a Romaniei, 2006. The 2006 report confirms the validity of these figures. Law no. 43/2003 establishes a threshold for the membership fees of a maximum of 100 minimum salaries. Three years later, the threshold was reduced to a maximum of 48 minimum salaries (Law no. 334/2006, Art. 4, al. 3).

and electoral years. The total amount of the subscriptions tends to be higher in electoral years. By far, the PSD has the highest share of subscriptions with no major difference in terms of electoral or non-electoral year. It seems that there is complete synchronisation between the PSD emphasis on increased membership and the financial relevance of members. On the other hand, in the case of PRM, the state subsidies tend to be regularly higher than the subscriptions. This pattern can be explained by the abovementioned statutory confusion between members and supporters of the party. Similarly, the UDMR's ambiguous statutory definition of members explains its strong dependency on the state. The other parties have a more or less similar share of income based on membership fees. The PD and PNL subscriptions were slightly higher in 2004, but one could point out an almost even balance between the state subsidies and membership fees. In the case of the PD, the state subsidies represent 21.7% of the total income, while the subscriptions represent 17.5%. Similar proportions can be observed for the PNL, with state subsidies representing 20.7% of the total income, and subscriptions, 18.8%.

Therefore, the available data regarding party funding, even if not collected systematically, suggest that members offer major support for party budgets. Furthermore, various surveys suggested that broad membership enables parties to access indirect private donations made by particularly influential members³⁸. Although the relevance of the subscriptions varies from case to case, the Romanian political parties seem to adopt a *sui generis* financing strategy³⁹ relying both on subscriptions and public funding. This strategy of organisational survival resting on membership rolls explains the continuous effort of Romanian political parties to reinforce their recruitment process.

The members: from the statutory stipulations to party practice

Despite the plurality of formulas according to the party, the party on the ground is commonly involved in the mechanisms of the internal balance of power. Their integration and their leverage on the decision-making process depend both on statutory provisions and on different selection patterns. The intra-party relations between the

³⁸ The major difficulty in analysing these extremely high figures is the potential camouflage. It seems that either a limited group of members supports the party financially or that political parties seek to cover illicit donations under the banner of the subscriptions. *Raportul monitorizării campaniei electorale pentru alegerile locale – iunie 2004*, Asociația Pro Democratia, *Ghid practic pentru organizarea fondurilor partidelor și pentru transparența raportării*, Institutul pentru Politici Publice, A. MORARU (coord.), *Legislație și mecanisme de control privind finanțarea partidelor politice: Cehia, Polonia, România, Ucraina*, Policy Association for an Open Society, A. MORARU, *Banii din politica, principale date financiare din raportari electorale și fiscale ale partidelor politice din România în perioada 1999-2004*.

³⁹ In the early 1990s, private fund-raising including membership fees, individual and corporate donations represented 26.2% of the Czech parties' total income but only 7% of the Hungarian parties' total income, while the relevance of the state subsidies was of 55.8% in the Hungarian case and of 47.6% in the Czech case. I. VAN BIEZEN, *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 710. The only exception is constituted by the Czech communists. See M. WALECKI, 'Money and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe', *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaign*, IDEA Handbook Series, 2003, p. 73.

top-level leadership positions and the party grassroots could constitute an alternative explanation for the high membership rolls in the Romanian case.

Internal party incentives for members

All Romanian party statutes stipulate that party members have the right to run as candidates for leadership positions or for other political portfolios within the party organisation. Given the proportional representation, the selection of party candidates for the parliamentary elections constitutes an essential screening device for the party representatives in Parliament⁴⁰. The internal selection process varies in terms of inclusiveness of party members in the process. At the beginning of the 1990s, all political parties presented centralised patterns of internal recruitment. Nevertheless, 10 years after the fall of communism, different patterns of selection were implemented. For instance, from 2002 onwards, the PNL adopted a selection procedure introducing a ‘meritocratic criterion’: the party in central office establishes the lists of candidates for the local branches with poor electoral performances, whereas the Permanent Delegation validates the lists of candidates proposed by the local branches where the electoral results exceed the national average in the previous local elections. Two other parties (the UDMR and the PSD) opted at different moments in time⁴¹ for a more open selection process, i.e. party primaries. This method is only partially applied in the PSD (only 2/3 of the candidates were selected through primaries) and is fully operative in the case of the UDMR.

However, this general trend towards more inclusiveness of the party members in the candidate selection process does not necessarily imply a more pervasive selection process *per se*. The increased formalisation of the candidate selection processes introduced several restrictions. Besides the fact that the list of selection criteria is established at central level and has a compulsory character, several other constraints (such as party seniority) were added in order to reduce the potential pool of selection, consequently blocking the access of newcomers to eligible positions. Similar barriers were introduced for the national party leadership selection process. The UDMR and the PSD opted for party primaries, whereas the PD and the PNL select their party leadership through the party Congress.

Despite these variations, a common characteristic of the selection of party leaders emerged in all parties: the opportunity structure for the candidate selection process is reduced by the adoption of highly formalised recruitment procedures. Consequently, the statutes suggest an increase in the role of party members only as regards a particular type of party decentralisation. The shift in the selection procedures provides some incentives to participate in party activities. However, the rigid constraints imposed on candidacy function as a disincentive for party members to apply as candidates.

The membership figures were particularly high when these reconfigurations were first introduced. However, the recent decrease in membership figures was not

⁴⁰ T. SAALFELD, ‘Members of the Parliament and Governments in Western Europe: Agency Relations and Problems of Oversight’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 37, 2000, p. 353-376.

⁴¹ UDMR in 1995 and PSD in 2003.

concomitant to a change regarding the statutory prerogatives of the party on the ground. Therefore, one can emphasise that although the decision to open the selection process might have favoured a certain degree of mobilisation, this general trend is not preserved in the long run.

Redefining power of the local party organisations

When assessing the reconfiguration of membership prerogatives in the internal balance of power, it is necessary to go beyond the statutory explanations and focus on the party members' leverage within the organisation. In the Romanian case, similarly to other CEE countries, despite a certain overlapping of the party in central office and the party in public office, the political leaders dominate the decision-making process within the political organisations. However, what seems to constitute the Romanian idiosyncrasy is the important role played by the party on the ground. Despite the decreasing membership figures, the statutes are oriented towards the reinforcement of the local party branches.

The decentralisation of the selection processes increased the role of the local party branches. When observing the career patterns of the party representatives, it appears that the local form of capital became more and more important in the recruitment process. This pattern is best illustrated by the Romanian MPs. Although the lack of previous experience in the political field remains a constant in their selection, the local resources constitute a vital asset for their promotion. In 1990, 20.86% of Romanian deputies benefited from previous experience of this type, compared with 19.66% in 1992, 16.32% in 1996, and 30.44% in 2000⁴². At the same time, previous political experience at national level is rather insignificant in the MPs' selection process. A similar trend can be identified as regards the members of the executives. At the beginning of the 1990s, the appointed ministers did not benefit from local political experience in public offices. From 1997 onwards, there is a general increase in the number of ministers presenting such a profile at one stage in their careers. Seven ministers from the 2000-2004 cabinet (14.6%) and 14 ministers from the subsequent cabinet (26.4%) benefited from experience at local level. However, one distinction should be made: the centre right-wing parties are more inclined towards the selection of local party leaders in the executive teams. 41.5% (22) of the Romanian ministers who started their mandate in 2004 had occupied previous leadership positions at local level. The differences observed between parties reverse the framework described as regards the membership figures. The PSD inherited a powerful local base, whereas the right-wing parties, in order to survive, had to develop their local organisations. Therefore, while PSD was less constrained in its selection process, the right-wing parties had to implement a mechanism of selective incentives for the party branches, offering local leaders offices at national level in exchange for their loyalty.

In this context, the change in the selection processes suggests a reconfiguration of the role of local organisations and can provide an alternative explanation for the preservation of relatively high membership rolls. At party level, there are various examples certifying the relevance of the party on the ground, or at least of the local party

⁴² L. STEFAN, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

leaders, in appointing and dismissing the national leadership⁴³. From this perspective, the general focus should shift from national party politics towards the local branches. The weight of a local branch in terms of membership does in fact legitimise the local party elites to claim their direct participation in the internal decision-making process.

Conclusion

This paper emphasised the existence of a particular link between the post-communist parties and the state, which could help understand the Romanian case. The parties are still highly connected with the citizenry even if the intensity of this connection seems to be waning. At the same time, parties were integrated within the state as part of a collusive system of management in which the party in government has preferential access to public structures. Therefore, one could identify a reciprocal exchange whereby parties offer preferential access to the state structures in exchange for the allegiance and/or subscription of party members. This exchange enables parties to enlarge and maintain their membership. This system concerns exclusively those parties in power either at local or central level. However, the direction of the exchange relation is still unclear and further research ought to be undertaken.

Still, a way to circumvent the quagmire is to relate to a Romanian paradox. While the Romanian party system is characterised by weak party-voter linkages, high volatility, low trust in parties and partisan institutions, and rampant anti-party attitudes, the Romanian parties maintain their broad enrolments. In this paradoxical situation, the member is defined as the one who signs an engagement to the party, pays a subscription (although to a relatively unclear extent) and, in exchange for allegiance, is part of a network of preferential access to the state's assets.

At the current stage, the Achilles' heel of this analysis concerns the lack of explanations provided for the membership decline that Romanian parties experienced from 2000 onwards. Despite persistent legal requirements supporting extensive membership, the decline could be explained by a potential reinforcement of civil society. In her famous *Democratic Phoenix*, Norris emphasised that the apparent crisis of the contemporary parties linked to the disengagement of their social roots can be encompassed as a sign of democratic reinforcement⁴⁴. In other words, instead of an active involvement in traditional forms of political participation, postmaterialistic citizens would opt for non-traditional channels of expression. Could this be the case in Romania too? Another potential explanation could be the increasing loss of power that parties have experienced in their relationship with the state. A decrease in their potential of *lotizzazione* could have generated a decline in the incentives for joining a party. Both in terms of status and direct advantages, party membership is no longer a guarantee for success and social prestige. Further analyses are needed in order to dismantle this enigma. For the moment, the only relevant conclusion is *Hic sunt leones!*

⁴³ This is the case of Ion Iliescu or Petre Roman. Furthermore, despite the allegiance of 81 MPs, the former Prime Minister Nastase, prosecuted for corruption, was dismissed from the party hierarchy following a decision supported by 36 out of 42 local organisations.

⁴⁴ P. NORRIS, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002.