Vote-Seeking among Non-Resident Citizens:

How Romanian Parties Form Organisations Abroad

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Abstract

Non-resident voters can be an important share of the electorate. To compete for their votes, parties in the country of origin establish organisations abroad. This article analyses the organisations established by Romanian parliamentary parties in the countries hosting large numbers of Romanian migrants. The analysis relies on qualitative content analysis of party statutes and semi-structured interviews. The results indicate that parties differ in their degree of formalisation, territorial coverage and division of power when establishing their organisations abroad.

Keywords: party organisation, formation, non-resident citizens, Romania

Introduction

A great deal of what happens in party politics is about organisation. Party organisation plays a major role both in the internal life of the party and in its external electoral support (Scarrow, Webb & Poguntke, 2017; Gherghina & Soare, 2019). So far, research has dealt with the ways in which party organisations operate within the territory of a country. However, in a context of increased migration and proliferation of multiple citizenships, political rights are no longer exclusively bounded to the territory of a country (Lafleur, 2013). Many countries allow their non-resident citizens to vote in national elections. There are instances in which the votes of non-residents have influenced the election outcomes. With a few notable exceptions

(Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020), there is little emphasis on how political parties form and make use of organisations abroad. Beyond the novelty of the phenomenon, the explanation is also connected to the limited dialogue between the traditional literature on party politics and the literature on migration in general.

This article seeks to address this gap in the literature and analyses how the Romanian parliamentary parties form organisations abroad. It focuses on the model of party formation, formalisation of rules, territorial coverage and distribution of power (relative to the central office in the home country). The theoretical approach lies primarily in the literature on party politics, but important nuances are brought in from research on migration. More specifically, the study is embedded in a broader framework that accounts for the external (i.e. the electoral rules, party rivals, voters' behaviour, etc.) and internal factors (i.e. dynamics among competing elites, inputs from local entrepreneurs) that make parties more likely to build organisations.

The study focuses on Romania because it is one of the most important migrant-sending countries in Europe, being part of the five largest groups of EU citizens that took residence in another EU country (World Migration Report, 2018). There are two analytical dimensions of interest: the national party organisation in charge with the community of non-residents and the party organisation in the host countries. The qualitative analysis includes five political parties: the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL), the People's Movement Party (PMP), the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Save Romania Union (USR). To cover these dimensions, we use a qualitative content analysis of party documents (statutes and regulations), archival material of newspapers and 12 semi-structured interviews with senior party representatives and members of Parliament (MPs).

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The first section discusses theoretical considerations regarding party organisation and the literature on the enfranchisement of migrants. The second section highlights the rationale for case selection with details on the methodology and data sources. The third section analyses how Romanian parties organise abroad. The final section concludes by emphasising some of the potential implications of these findings for the broader literature.

Party Organisations and External Franchise

The extra-legislative party organisations are "key transmission channels for organizing representation, helping to translate popular demands into legislative initiatives, and acting as gatekeepers which determine which candidates have a chance of being elected" (Scarrow and Webb, 2017, p. 1). Earlier research shows that parties with strong organisations have a major electoral advantage. This happens because their extensive, intensive and professionalized local presence provides stronger connections with voters' needs and demands. They are also more likely to be seen as credible policy-makers since they have the resources needed for competent, and accountable agendas (Tavits, 2013; Gherghina, 2014; Gauja, 2017; Borz and de Miguel, 2019).

In line with rational models of organisation theory, the literature on both new and old democracies argued that parties need strategies to successfully compete in elections and to adjust to potentially hostile environments (Biezen, 2003; Gherghina, 2014; Borz and de Miguel, 2019). From the party perspective, an extensive network of local organisations equates to profitable means to win elections and achieve public office. However, there are several relevant costs such as the financial investments for physical structures, equipment, professional human resources, candidate recruitment procedures etc. These investments require long-term and continuous commitment, and can put the party under stress (Tavits, 2013). The costs come in the form of distribution of power also with local elites and activists may attempt to challenge the unity around the national party leadership (Ceron, 2019).

Party organisations are often presented as territorially-based social and physical structures created by patterns of interaction and relationships. A patter of repeated interaction provides stability and ensures the achievement of shared goals such as obtaining and maintaining public office. However, the post-1989 waves of East-West migration in Europe reshaped the national state-centred politics. They provided new options for the electoral outreach reach of national parties. An increasing number of countries designed policies aimed to engage their non-resident citizens in the homeland politics (Lafleur, 2013; Turcu and Urbatsch, 2015; Østergaard-Nielsen, Ciornei and Lafleur, 2019). In parallel, the literature analysed the effects of the migration on individual level both in terms of material (i.e. socio-economic

achievements) and non-material aspects (i.e. improvement of the cognitive situation, diffusion of democratic attitudes and behaviours) (Careja & Emmenegger, 2011; Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020).

At a collective level, this array of effects further impacted in terms of making more assertive claims for recognition of their political rights in both host and home countries (Cousin, Bianchi & Vitale, 2020). The literature signals ample room for manoeuvre for parties aiming at creating stable channels of mobilisation and trying to create a permanent anchoring of their structures within these communities of nationals based abroad (Lafleur, 2013; Paarlberg, 2017; Burgess, 2018). This body of research points to different motivations behind parties' strategy to extend their territories abroad and to the existing variation among parties within the same countries (Paarlberg, 2017; Koinova, 2018).

A dialogue between these two strands of literature can provide useful insights into the relations between the post-territorialised demos (i.e. non-resident citizens) and the way parties display organisational networks in the new communities. The general arguments of our text build on this dialogue. The point of the departure is that the formation of transnational organisations has both benefits (electoral support) and costs (finances, human capital). Earlier empirical evidence shows relatively low levels of participation among citizens residing abroad (Ciornei and Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020). Political parties are likely to form organisations abroad when the electoral stake becomes high. This can mean several things such as the importance of non-resident votes, the mobilisation capacity of non-residents over residents (Gherghina, 2015) or the institutional allocation of seats for parliamentary representation. .

In terms of electoral support, parties can form organizations abroad to mobilize a favourable electorate of non-resident and to convince a potential hostile electorate to alter its voting behaviour. As illustrated by Tavits (2013) at national level, local party organisations approach hostile voters to either change their opinions through persuasion or to control their (subversive) voicing. In democracies political parties act in competitive environments and they can be compared with their opponents' practices. Parties forming organisations abroad could

be portrayed as caring about the representation of non-resident. Those parties who do not pursue the same avenue may be criticised against the benchmark set by their competitors.

At the same time, the parties' decision about when and where to form organisations depends on the potential risks associated to the alteration of intra-party dynamics (Tavits, 2013; Gauja, 2017; Ceron, 2019). For example, the extra-territorial organisations that can sustain an active mobilisation over time are likely to challenge the national leadership over control, i.e. aim at self- management. The risk of such conflicts can motivate national elites to block and even abandon the development of organisations abroad.

Research Design

There are three major reasons for which Romania is an appropriate case for this analysis: the large community of non-residents, the early recognition of their political rights, and the increased political relevance. First, the country has the highest growth of migrants in the last two decades among the countries that did not face a conflict. Since 2015, Romania entered the world's top 20 migrant-sending countries with almost one fifth of its population living abroad (World Migration Report, 2018). Most Romanian migrants are located in EU countries, around 2.8 million, of which 1,150,000 are officially registered in Italy and around 900,000 in Spain. Large communities of Romanians are also present in the United Kingdom, France and Germany (Vintila and Soare, 2018).

Second, Romanian non-resident nationals held the right to active suffrage for national elections since the early 1990s. Until 2008, the votes abroad were counted with those of domestic voters in the electoral district of Bucharest. Since 2008, the Romanian non-resident citizens received special representation with four geographical districts assigned to them, electing four deputies and two senators. Since 2016, postal voting has been introduced for non-resident citizens and in the 2019 presidential elections the non-resident voters could vote in three consecutive days (compared to one for residents).

Third, despite the increase in the total number of non-residents, the turnout abroad has remained low. On average, presidential elections have higher turnout, than legislative elections (Vintila and Soare, 2018). In the 2009 presidential elections, the non-resident voters

decisively influenced the electoral outcome. The national voters had a slight preference for the challenger, but a higher difference in absolute numbers from non-resident voters determined a re-election of the incumbent. In the 2014 presidential elections, incidents at the voting stations in diaspora generated waves of protests and determined heavy mobilisation against the incumbent prime minister who was running for president (Gherghina, 2015). Also, the non-resident citizens influenced the government agenda through protests. For example, in 2018 the justice reform endorsed by the government has led to a mass protest under the slogan "Diaspora at Home".

The analysis focuses on four current parliamentary parties (PSD, PNL, PMP and USR) plus one former parliamentary party - the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL) that ceased to exist in 2014 after a merger with the PNL. The latter is covered by the analysis due to its pioneering role in establishing organisations abroad and due to its legacies for the current PNL and PMP. Our sample of parties varies in terms of age, formation, and size. The first two are established parties, with a long tradition in Romanian politics and extensive presence in government. The PSD is a successor party that won all but one popular vote since its formation in 1992 and reached a peak of support in 2016 (more than 46% of the votes). The PNL is a historical party. Banned under the communist regime, the party elite emigrated to Western countries, maintained informal connections, with a formal reorganisation in 1990. Its electoral support is around 20%. The remaining two parties are newly emerged political parties. The PMP is a splinter of the PDL and was formed in 2013 by supporters of the former country president, Băsescu; its electoral support is around 5%. The USR emerged before the 2016 legislative elections. The party runs an anti-corruption, pro-environment and pro-European agenda. Its electoral support is around 10% and the party is the third largest in the Romanian Parliament.

Our analysis uses electoral laws, party laws, documents of the Permanent Electoral Authority, party statutes, internal party documents, and articles from national and diaspora newspapers. In addition, we conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with senior representatives of parties and MPs representing the non-residents (Appendix 1). The interviews took place between April and July 2018, with an average duration of 35 minutes. Due to the broad geographic coverage, we used video and voice calls. We received consent for recording from 10 interviewees and for the other two cases (Interview 4 and 12) we took notes of the

conversation. We included three types of respondents: from the direction of the party in the host-country, from central office and MPs with special reserved seats for the non-resident communities of citizens. One interview was carried out with a senior government official from the Ministry of Romanians Abroad who did not declare a political affiliation.

Building networks of local organisations abroad

Our empirical analysis focuses on two major aspects: 1) the origin of organisations abroad, with a focus on the timing and the models of formation (upwards vs. top-down) and 2) the outcomes in terms of level of formality of the rules, the territorial coverage and the distribution of power between the party central office in Romania and the extra-territorial organisations.

The USR is the only Romanian party that provides an official timeline regarding the origins of its organisations abroad. The official webpages of other parties include sometimes a tab with a synthetic narrative on the general evolution of the party (e.g. Website PSD Diaspora) or with schematic information about the organisation in diaspora (e.g. Website PNL Diaspora). The formation of party organisations abroad was triggered by the 2008 reform of the electoral law. One of the important changes brought by this law was the existence of separate constituencies for non-resident voters. The post-2008 dispositions regulating the allocation of special seats for non-resident citizens was the result of an intense lobbying from associations focusing on communities of non-residents (Vintila and Soare, 2018). Although the district magnitude of the constituencies for non-resident voters was similar to that of a small Romanian county, it was a sufficient motivation for the Romanian political parties to pay attention to non-resident nationals. The first mentioning of official extra-territorial branches dates back to 2009 and belongs to the PDL and the PSD, followed by other competitors.

However, for the 2008 elections, the Romanian political parties did not have the time to build formal local organisations abroad (Interviews 1, 2, 6, 10, 12). They established some contacts with already existing local forms of activism (e.g. associations or foundations of Romanians abroad, often with a cultural profile) or individual entrepreneurs willing to support the party. At this stage, all was on an informal basis, with these organisations and individuals creating *ad hoc* forums or Facebook profiles dedicated to the local communities in order to promote the

parties they represented/endorsed, to gather specific requests, or even to run online surveys within the communities (Popescu, 2012). There was low coordination within and across local organisations belonging to political parties (Interviews 6 and 11).

The Beginnings: The PDL, a trend-setter

The first Romanian party to build official extra-territorial organisation was the PDL. The party started its extra-territorial network of branches in connection with the initiatives taken by the country president – the former chair of the PDL – to bridge the gap with the kin-communities of Romanians in neighbouring countries. As a result, it opened the first PDL local office in the capital of the Republic of Moldova. The country president got closer to the Romanians abroad by attending different meetings (e.g. the Congress of Romanians abroad) and openly asking for their support to fight corruption (Ciornei, 2016). Building on these, the formation of the PDL diaspora organisation took place through the establishment of local party branches enrooted in local associations (Brînză, 2011). Informal structures started bourgeoning in 2006-2007:

> In 2006, people knew that Romania shall become a Member State; people in Romania knew that the power of the diaspora will grow both in Romania and the host countries (…) Several persons foresaw this potential and decided to organize themselves at the diaspora level. All welcome, but chaotic! (Interview 12)

Formal branches have been organized since 2009, in the context of the Presidential elections. Spain was the first country where the PDL set-up a large number of branches, followed by Italy and France (Brînză 2011; Interview 9). One of the interviewees explains how the process took place in Spain:

> Individuals with experience in the associational movement have been identified and asked to join the party. (…) The PDL functioned well in the area of Castellón where many Romanians used to work and live. There were many associations also. Successively they organised in Madrid and the rest of Spain (Interview 12).

These original local organisations benefited from capillary societal roots within the community of non-residents and the support of associations of Romanians, although not uniformly spread across and within the host countries. There were two alternative forms of organisation (Popescu, 2012): (1) a network of local branches established in the localities with strong migrant presence (e.g. in Italy, Spain, France, and Portugal) and (2) a centralised organisation set up to coordinate the activities on the ground (e.g. in the USA, Canada, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Republic of Moldova and the UK). Until 2012, the (in)formal PDL diaspora organisation was in a condition of mutual interdependence with the central party office. It acknowledged the need for a network of extra-territorial branches and their representatives agreed on sharing competences with the national office.

In the follow-up to the 2012 elections, the organisational chart is clarified: the diaspora is organised first with a central office in Bucharest, then by macro-area (Europe, Asia, and the Americas), and by host country. Within the host-country, sub-national organisations were organised in correspondence to polling sections available (Interview 12). This initial phase of organisation formation meant high dependence on local entrepreneurs and on the pre-requisite of a numerous and stable community of Romanian migrants, which explains why the organisation functioned better in Europe, in particular in the community with large numbers of Romanians (i.e. Italy and Spain) (Interview 9, 12). The official recognition of the diaspora-based organisation and the statutory codification occurred in 2010, at the Congress in Paris. The PDL central organisation was assimilated to a county level. On this ground, in the aftermath of the 2013 Congress of the PDL, the internal tensions between the supporters of then President Băsescu and the newly elected party leadership brought to a parting of the ways. Part of the PDL network and members eventually moved towards the People's Movement Party (PMP). The main part of the PDL merged with the historical National Liberal Party (PNL). The newly created party retain the National Liberal Party name.

Old Wine in New Bottles: The PNL Models of Organisation

The pre-2014 PNL had an organisation model built on a fluid and informal network of personal contacts in those countries where the Romanian opponents of the communists established after 1947 (Interviews 8, 9).

Historically speaking, the first diaspora-based organisations can be traced back to the anti-communist parties in exile since 1947, in the UK in the 60s and the 70s, in Switzerland, and the USA. But after the Revolution there have been several attempts in France to organize branches of the historical parties, the PNL and the Peasants' Party. The parties we know today started to organize when the number of Romanians abroad raised (Interview 6).

With regard to the PNL, the first post-communist liberal clubs were informal networks, formed bottom-up in the early 1990s in Western Germany and in France, with a strong endorsement from the central level (Interviews 8, 9). According to our interviewees, since the 1990s, the central party has encouraged the organisation of liberal clubs abroad:

But these were only liberal clubs and not properly organized party structures, and this because of the electoral law. Until 2008, there were no special seats for the Romanians living abroad diaspora. The non-resident votes were grouped at the level of the sector 1 Bucharest (…) But there were not so many votes, there were very few pooling sections also (…). And the parties, or at least the PNL; did not organize distinct structures abroad. The party encouraged non-resident citizens to form liberal clubs, but considering that their votes were counted at the Bucharest level, they did not have many incentives either (Interview 8).

In the early 2000s, this network broadened in parallel with increasing flows of Romanian migrants to Western Europe. Clubs were organized in Italy, Spain and Greece (Interview 6). Most of these local structures were strongly dependent on the personal contacts and skills of single individuals (i.e. the clubs in Cologne and Bonn – interview 8). In several cases, personal contacts of the central leaders in Bucharest were activated to build local organisation top-down: 'With regard to the old PNL, I know that in the UK, a lady has been mandated, if I am not mistaken by Rady Câmpeanu (n.a. – leader of the historical anti-communist liberals), to create a liberal club back in 2011' (Interview 9). From the early 2000 until 2012-2013, both bottom-up and top-down strategies coexisted at the non-residents' community level. In small communities of Romanians, liberal clubs were usually created top-down by the central office, while in historical or broader communities of non-residents, liberal clubs grew bottom-up out of local groupings and/or individual political entrepreneurs. These informal structures were the grounds for what happened in the context of the 2008 electoral reform. In most of the cases, these liberal clubs were formed by 'dedicated people, without an electoral interest' (Interview 8). On the eve of the 2008 elections, the first PNL organisational structures were created at the district-level and the country level (Interview 8). The territorial infrastructure

remained unbalanced. Most of the branches were localised in West European cities and in the United States.

In the post-2014 PNL, after the merger with the PDL, the two distinctive organisational models merged. Despite the fact that the PNL retained the original name of the homonym historical party, the significant differences in the organisational and political legacies between the two parties could not be fully be solved. The interviewees identified the stronger relevance of the PDL expertise, a party known for well-developed relations with the communities abroad (Interviews 6, 9). Interviewee 8 openly states: 'I have to admit that the former PDL was a little bit more developed with regard to the organisation at the diaspora level'. In parallel, the diaspora-based media testified for a tensed situation within the newly created PNL between the branches originating from the PDL and the old PNL. This came along with strong electoral support in diaspora where the PDL had representatives on a regular basis. As such, the PDL functional organisation became the benchmark for the new PNL (Interview 12).

Broadly speaking, after 2014 the PNL organisation abroad follows the PDL model: local organisations at the level of the host-countries and subunits in correspondence to polling sections (Interview 12). Essentially, the process of re-organisation of the diaspora network copy-pasted the dispositions of Chapter 6F (The Organisations from abroad, Statute of PDL) into the general features of the Internal Organisation (Chapter 2A, Statute PNL 2014).

However, the PDL model did not fully replace the previously loosely organized PNL. There are countries in which the PNL diaspora displays a hybrid constellation in which the two legacies continue to co-exist (i.e. in Germany). This mixture is characterized by the need to balance and reconcile two distinct legacies, alongside the main organisational interest in securing representation in the diaspora district. This is also reflected in two different approaches to organisation formation, top-down vs. bottom-up, which can be difficult to accommodate for the local organisations abroad. Sometimes these tensions result in individual defections or the split of the entire local organisation as it happened with several branches in Spain and Italy in the spring of 2016 (*Gazeta românească* 2016a).

New Wine in Old Bottles: The PMP Models

The PMP organisation and human resources illustrate important legacies from the PDL. This applies also to the strategic investment in the territorial network abroad and the special status for the organisation in the Republic of Moldova. According to different interviewees (Interviews 3, 4 and 11), the party's network abroad grew as a mixture of bottom-up out of local groups (i.e. the Republic of Moldova, France and Spain) and central elites' endeavour to build a wider extra-territorial organisation (i.e. Belgium and partially Italy). The origins of the network can be traced back to the very foundation of the party in 2013, but it is mainly on the eve of the 2014 elections for the European parliament that the mobilization on the ground intensified (Georgescu 2018). Interview 3 confirms this: the origins of the PMP diaspora can be traced back to the '2014 elections for the European parliament, when the party obtained a fairly good result'.

Two distinct lines of party formation can be identified: one controlled by the original party leadership (2013-2015) and one endorsed by representatives of the diaspora community in a bottom-up process. The first line was animated by loyalty towards Băsescu, the (in)formal leader of the party. Personal linkages between the leaders in Bucharest and representatives of the diaspora community in different host-countries provided part of the recruitment pools that sustained the organisation on the ground (Interview 3). The appeal of Băsescu in the communities of migrants coupled with the endorsement of national values (and in particular the support for the project of unification with the Republic of Moldova) further facilitated the strategy of the central office. One of the interviewees (Interview 3) explains that 'I enrolled in the PMP for Traian Băsescu. (…) Romania does not need scientists in power, but patriots!'. A similar story is told by another respondent (Interview 4):

> Why I entered politics? Because I feel Romanian. I feel sorry for what happens in Romania. I would like changing something there. From here, we see things differently (…). I contacted the party on an individual basis. I registered online. They called me back and asked me to form a local structure here and mobilize other Romanians.

The second line took shape mainly within the diaspora communities in Spain and France driven by local entrepreneurs. The party organisations extended progressively through the

integration of other units in different host countries: 'We started with a template of Facebook page in order to avoid the chaos. In this way, we maintained the control when somebody ask to launch a new Facebook page in a different host-country' (Interview 10). Most notably, this strategy of organisational development occurred in parallel with the central party's own strategies on the ground. 'Nobody knew about us, not even the party (…) I got the cell number of E. Tomac (n.a. the president of the party) three years later. I hadn't been talking to anybody in central office for three years' (Interview 11).

This path of organisation was about an alternative vision of the role and function of the party organisations abroad: 'The Centre tried to organize the Diaspora, but the Diaspora organizes itself and does not accept people from Bucharest, it claimed its own candidates' (Interview 11). This bottom-up formation of the PMP organisations in diaspora led to the temporary isolation from the centre of those local organisations where entrepreneurs controlled the formation process and claimed to have the group representatives involved in the management of the central offices.

These two models of organisation formation created a tension between the interests of the central office to guarantee an effective leadership (i.e. effective mechanisms of recruitment, standardized organisational management etc.) and those of the extra-territorial branches (i.e. recruitment and replacement of candidates and leaders, agenda setting, etc.). Under different forms and intensities, this tension remained valid until the 2018 Congress of the PMP when several sub-national branches in different host countries defected (Georgescu 2018) or left to the Romanian Ecologist Party.

Originally, eight host-countries were covered. According to the most recent information available, the party extended the original network to five new countries with other five organisations being under construction (Interview 11). In direct connection with the characteristics of the community of non-residents (number and territorial concentration), the post-2015 PMP strategy encouraged the development of local sections in parallel to the available polling sections for external voting in the host countries of reference. In the 13 stable organisations, the number of sub-national organisations available corresponds to 70% of the polling stations (Interview 11).

The pressure applied by the local organisations on the central office illustrates not only certain local organisations' strong dependency on individual decision-makers, but also the propensity of the post-2015 PMP central leadership to create a decentralized party structure. There are implicit risks of internal conflict, as for example in the June 2018 resignation of part of the diaspora network in opposition to the newly elected central leadership for diaspora. The decentralized structure explains also the reduced capacity of national elites to solve these tensions.

The Oscillatory Trajectory of the Social Democrats

The first PSD structures abroad – established in 2005 – were informal and originated in political entrepreneurs that migrated to Italy and Spain. These entrepreneurs formed local networks with 'people who had previous experience of political activism in the PSD, who migrated and continued their involvement in the party' (Interview 1). These informal organisations were fed by the 'entrepreneurial spirit of those who emigrated (…) There was no Bucharest-sourced project; these persons felt in their hearts and they took the initiative' (Interview 1). At a later stage, the PSD central office in Bucharest officially endorsed these informal organisations in the eve of the 2008 elections. This formal status was broadly applied to organisations in diaspora starting with 2010.

One concrete example illustrates the steps of the process. In Italy, the PSD organisation emerged and functioned initially as a private association, legally registered according to the Italian law by a Romanian migrant in July 2007 (Interview 2). The idea of a formal local organisation endorsed by the PSD central office in Bucharest came after an official visit of the PSD MPs in Italy in 2007 (*Gazeta românească* 2011). More specifically, it emerged during a dinner chat between a Romanian MP and a member of the community of Romanian migrants in Italy. On this issue, according to one of the participants, the question was: 'Why don't we launch a local branch (…) in order to give Romanians a political culture instead of just working' (Interview 2). This is consistent with the statements of the founder of the Italian organisation: 'In two weeks' time, I already had a team. (…) I had friends who wanted to get involved. (…) we met (…) in a restaurant. We made an association, wrote a statute 'The PSD Rome Association which adheres to PSD Romania'' (*Gazeta românească,* 2011). The 2010 PSD

Statute includes references to a diaspora-based organisation (art. 218, Section V; Statute PSD 2010). The organisational structure and its rights and duties were equated to those of a PSD county Organisation (art. 222, art. 218, Section V; Statute PSD 2010). In October 2010, the national PSD Diaspora was legally created with an original network covering Italy, UK, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, US, Canada, Israel, and the Republic of Moldova.

According to our interviewees, the PSD Diaspora achieved relatively quickly a wide territorial expansion through both the multiplication of the sub-national branches and the launching of new organisations. This territorial expansion did not occur in a homogenous manner; there were relevant differences in terms of territorial coverage both across and within host-countries. In Spain, the PSD developed stronger territorial subunits in Madrid, but also in the regions of Andalusia and Catalonia. In Italy, at the end of 2016, the PSD had 32 sub-national branches across Italy with 3,700 members (Interview 2). Most of these sub-national branches are concentrated in the Northern and Central Italy, with different capacities to enrol members: from 30 to 70 members in small local units like Venice to around 500 members in Milan, Turin or Rome (Interview 2).

The two-phase creation of the PSD organisations in diaspora indicate extensive autonomy in the hands of the local leaders with minimum involvement from the central office in Romania. This is confirmed by one of our respondents who explained that organisations in the host country have control on decisions between and during elections, as well as a preferential access to the pool of candidates for the elected offices or post-electoral appointments (i.e. general consuls of Romania), and or positions in the central executive bodies (Interview 1, 2, 6). This is however not exclusively connected to the PSD. The respondent number 6 pinpointed that this is a general praxis in Romanian politics:

> From this point of view, it is important to look at the way the Romanian Government designates the consuls in Italy and Spain. In most of the cases, political parties prefer designating people representing the local communities, people active in the party life.

The autonomy of the local level lasted until the election of a new party leader in 2015. Since then, the PSD central office regularly attempted to weaken the position of the organisations

in the host-countries (Interviews 1, 2). In several cases, the founding leaders resigned, and the initial organisation disappeared or changed political affiliation.

Loose Ends: The USR Model

Although the USR is a newly created party, its initial statute did not foresee the possibility to form organisations abroad. In less than one year, the statute introduced explicit regulations regarding the functioning of the diaspora organisation (Section 4.2, Statute USR 2017). This delayed action was explained by our respondents as a result of the ambiguities in the party regulation with regard to the criterion of territorial organisation of a party (Interview 7). However, the party has been active in diaspora since 2016, on the basis of a core of voluntary members based in Paris (Interview 5, 7). The impetus for the 2016 informal organisation came from the need to present the list of signatures for the candidates for the diaspora seats in Parliament: 'The 2016 legislative elections forced the creation of a team. Parties were required to present their electoral list for the diaspora electoral circumscription' (Interview 7). Part of the individuals that took part in the bottom-up mobilization were officially registered as members of one of the national branches in Romania, an ad hoc solution. Most of those animating the informal unit in Paris knew themselves well before the political involvement in the USR (Interview 5, 8). This process of bottom-up formation converged with the general strategy of the national leadership:

> The structure originated bottom-up. Well, Nicușor or Clotilde[1] knew people and told them: 'Come on guys, get involved and make a good job'. But it was definitely not about appointing X as our man in the diaspora! As I saw the phenomenon, people from the centre looked for contacts in the diaspora, they found and asked them to get involved, they've got to know each other and they organized among themselves! (Interview 8).

The informal organisation was soon followed by a formal recognition from the party, thus being in line with the party emphasis on members as stakeholders of the USR project. The Statute refers to the USR members not only as supporters during elections times, but also as a crucial component of a horizontal organisation. Such an organisation requires active

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[1] The two names (Nicusor Dan and Clotilde Armand) are leading figures in the USR, quite likely the names associated by the public the mot with the party.

involvement in the decision-making process, in the implementation of the national/local projects (i.e. the project USR is your Voice) and a strong ethical behaviour (i.e. Politics without Convicted) (Interview 5).

According to the interviews, one year after the official formation of the diaspora organisation, the structure remains less structured: beyond the central office of the diaspora in Bucharest, there is no stable headquarter abroad and there are no formal organisations operating beyond the Paris structure. Activities of networking have been extended to other capital cities across Western Europe. The membership of the diaspora organisation raised from the initial 60 members to approximatively 300 members (Interview 7). Initially, most members came from France (and in particular Paris) and later from London (interview 7). In general, the formal organisation in Paris and the extended European network operate on the basis of volunteer work, without professional paid staff. The absence of the latter is counterbalanced by the involvement of various individuals with private professional skills and competencies that volunteer to work for USR activities and campaigns (Interview 5). This is compliant with the location of the party abroad, urban area with a specific community of non-residents (i.e. medium-high level of education, young inhabitants in urban areas, etc.). The limited extension of the territorial structure of the USR organisation abroad is justified on functional grounds:

> If we had participated in local elections, we would have done it. But it's not our case. (...) The diaspora is special because there are many professionals who contribute to the party in a different way. Not because they are candidates.' (Interview 5).

However, in the aftermath of the 2019 elections for the European parliament, the USR territorial organisation abroad radically changed. It is officially considered 'the USR's largest territorial branch, both in terms of number of units and geographical coverage' (https://diaspora.usr.ro/despre-usr/). This organisation development is compliant with the most recent electoral results (the 2019 EP and presidential elections).

Comparing the Romanian parties

Table 1 summarizes the comparison between the five parties investigated in this article. The comparison is the result of an inductive approach and focuses on four analytical dimensions, which were discussed in detail in the previous sub-sections. These dimensions are: the model of formation, the existence of formal rules, territorial coverage and the distribution of power. With respect to the model of formation, the empirical evidence shows that 2008 is the year in which Romanian parties started organising abroad. This is directly linked to the extensive migration that was envisaged after the country's EU accession, when travel became easier. All organisations abroad had a strong bottom-up component. The grassroots play a relevant role with ambitious political entrepreneurs regularly testing their abilities in mobilizing support and, eventually, challenging the parties' central offices in Romania. The bottom-up approach was complemented in some cases by other elements such as the leadership and identity-based rhetoric (e.g. PDL), personal linkages between diaspora entrepreneurs and central offices in the home country (e.g. PNL) or historical legacies of informal party structures (i.e. PNL).

Table 1 about here

In roughly one decade after their formation, the organisations have a high degree of formality. Even the two parties that emerged recently on the Romanian political arena (PMP and USR), rapidly followed the route of formalisation. The PMP used the PDL approach in which formalisation proved the key to stability. This resulted in a high degree of formalisation at an early stage, i.e. their organisation was built less than five years before our interviews. For a while, the USR has been the only party with limited formalisation. One year after the interviews we conducted, in the preparation for the 2019 European elections, the party organisation underwent a process of routinisation in which it became more rule-guided and less influenced the ad hoc choices of local entrepreneurs or central elites. Table 1 reflects the situation of the USR organisation at the time of the interviews, to be comparable with the other parties.

With respect to the territorial coverage, our interviewees depicted a relatively homogenous pattern. These party organisations function for the most part in large European capitals and not much beyond that. This correspond to the unequal distribution of the Romanian migrants

in the host-countries. It often matches the countries in which non-residents have the highest turnout in legislative or presidential elections.

When looking at the distribution of power, there is great variation between the parties. The PDL and the USR give extensive autonomy to their organisations abroad. The PMP chooses to divide the power between the central office in Romania and the organisations abroad, which is consistent with their mode of formation. The PNL has centralized organisation with most decisions being taken by the central office in Romania. In the PSD case, we identify to stages: initially spaces of autonomy are granted, the level of centralization increases after the 2015 change in the national party leadership.

Conclusions

This article analysed how the Romanian parliamentary parties form organisations abroad. The findings are consistent with previous research about the organisational extension of national parties in diaspora (Paarlberg, 2017). In contemporary countries of emigration, many political parties form organisations to maximise their electoral support among non-residents. In the Romanian case, the starting point for the formation of most party organisations abroad is a strategic decision related to greater mobility and larger share of the electorate becoming non-resident. The impetus for the creation of a party organisation exists also among parties that enjoy a limited support among non-residents. They have other motivations beyond vote-seeking. For example, with some exceptions such as the Republic of Moldova, the PSD gains very few votes in the communities of non-residents. And yet, it formed organisations abroad to match its legitimacy-seeking objectives, often met with adversity within the migrant communities.

In line with the literature discussing how political competitors react to their opponents' practices, many interviewees acknowledged that they checked their rivals' strategies in terms of party formation abroad. This can be seen as an attempt to understand and neutralize their opponents' electoral strategies or to maintain competitiveness. It can also be seen as a culturally based collective behaviour since most interviewees endorsed the idea of aggregation and representation of the non-residents' needs and interests in national politics.

Although formalized, these organisations abroad remain indebted to local entrepreneurs. This is a situation in which the autonomy of the local organisations weakens the stability of the organisation on the medium and long term. Changes in the profession of the party leader can induce changes in the party organisation. One interviewee explained how the leader of the organisation in Portugal moved with his job to a different country and the local organisation vanished into thin air (Interview 9). The evidence shows that local organisations abroad remain dominated by the idiosyncratic choices of the elites. There are two types of elites that matter here – those in the central office in the home country and those at the top of the organisations abroad – and there is relatively limited predictability about the relationships between them.

The implications of our study are important to the advancement of knowledge regarding party organisations. The results reveal the existence of another type of organisation than what is described in the literature. So far, studies emphasized the hierarchical relations between sub-units in a party, even in stratarchical structures. Most of the organisations established abroad by the Romanian parties have a very limited hierarchical component, with the structure relying extensively on horizontal nexus between the central office and local organisations. Moreover, the importance of grassroots in the formation of the party is a unique feature that is rarely observable at contemporary party organisations. This appears to be a feature of the parties in diaspora due to their high dependence on local entrepreneurs. While most theories would explain that this is a temporary feature, usually closer to the moment of formation, the empirical evidence shows that this feature continues to characterize the Romanian party organisations abroad ten years after their emergence.

Another important implication is that these findings contradict the earlier observations of Panebianco (1988) that guided much of the work in party politics. The applicability of this theory is limited when looking closely at the organisations abroad. Our comparison illustrates that parties with similar models of formation went in different directions. While this does not refute the original theory, it indicates that there is room for nuances and discussion. Further research can go down this route and explore in detail how models of organisation differ also across countries, not only within the same country. Our qualitative approach could be complemented by a quantitative survey with more party members from these organisations.

Future studies could thus expand beyond the level of elites to include more perspectives and include accurate details into the story of party formation.

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Table 1: The process of forming party organisations abroad

Party	Model of formation	Informal vs. formal rules	Territorial coverage	Distribution of power
PDL	Mixed bottom-up & impetus from the central office	Swift formalisation	Broad	Autonomy for diaspora organisations
PMP	Mixed: bottom-up & impetus from the central office	Directly formalized	Broad	Divided power
PNL	Mixed: Historical bottom-up origins & post-electoral reform impetus from the central office	Informal pre-2014 Formal post-2014	Limited (pre-2014) Broad (post-2014)	Centralized organisations
PSD	Bottom-up	Gradual formalisation	Broad	Autonomy pre-2015 Divided power post-2015
USR	Bottom-up	Limited formalisation	Very limited	Autonomy for diaspora organisations

Appendix 1. List of interviews

	Date	Position	Country	Political experience	Duration (minutes)
Interview 1	7.04.2018	Senior party representative PSD	Italy	2007	27
Interview 2	11.04.2018	Senior party representative PSD	Italy	2007	37
Interview 3	12.04.2018	Senior party representative PMP	Italy	2013	26
Interview 4	20.05.2018	Senior party representative PMP	Belgium	2014	30
Interview 5	15.06.2018	Senior party representative central office USR	France	2016	41
Interview 6	27.06.2018	Senior government official (Ministry of Romanians Abroad)	Romania	-	26
Interview 7	28.06.2018	MP (special seat) USR	France	2016	45
Interview 8	28.06.2018	MP (special seat) PNL	Romania	1991	24
Interview 9	28.06.2018	Senior party representative central office PNL	Romania	2015	27
Interview 10	29.06.2018	MP (special seat) PNL & PMP	Spain	2012*	64
Interview 11	2.07.2018	MP (special seat) PMP	Spain	2013	27
Interview 12	7.07.2018	Senior party representative, central office PNL	Spain	2012	50

Note: *Political experience in PPDD, PMP, PNL, ALDE.