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## ROMANIA AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE ELECTIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT – A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** The present study proposes to x-ray the evolution of the European Parliament elections in Romania from 2007 to the present, with the perspective of a better understanding of the meaning of this type of elections. The study is based, in particular, on quantitative research that has the role of providing statistical data and comparative graphics that outline a clear picture of the participation in the vote and the results obtained in the five voting polls through which our country passed upon joining the European Union.

**Keywords:** Romania, European Parliament elections, turnout, results, European Parliament

Every five years the European Union elects its representatives to the European Parliament, which is “the only directly elected transnational assembly in the world”<sup>1</sup>. Euro-parliamentarians, who represent the interests of the citizens of the Union at the European level, together with the representatives of the governments of the states in the Union, shape and decide laws that have the role of influencing all aspects of life in the Union space – “from supporting the economy to the fight against poverty and changes climate and security aspects. MEPs bring important political, economic and social issues to the center of attention and support the values of the European Union: respect for human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law”<sup>2</sup>.

EU states are responsible for organizing elections, but there are also common provisions that they must apply: (1) elections take place over a four-day period (from Thursday to Sunday); (2) the number of MEPs elected from a political party is proportional to the number of votes received by that party; (3) EU citizens residing in another Union country can vote and stand for election in that country; (4) a citizen can vote only once<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Parlamentul European, Alegeri europene, 6-9 iunie 2024, <https://elections.europa.eu/ro/how-elections-work/>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem.*

A key role in the representation and designation of the number of deputies in the European Parliament is played by the demographic weight. The number of mandates is determined by the size of the states, taking into account the need to represent the least populated states. The Maastricht Treaty introduced the concept of European citizenship, which does not replace national citizenship, but complements it<sup>4</sup>. European citizenship is held by any person who has the citizenship of one of the EU states and grants, among other things, the right to reside anywhere in the territory of the Union and to move freely, the right to vote and to stand in European elections and in local elections in the state where he/ she has the residence, the right to elect members of the European Parliament, regardless of the residence held in the territory of the EU<sup>5</sup>.

In June 2024, 720 MEPs were elected (15 more than the previous legislature), and as a general rule we note that their number is decided before each round of elections. Also, the number of elected officials in each state is agreed before each election and is based on the principle of degressive proportionality. According to this principle, “each MEP from a larger country represents more citizens than an MEP from a smaller country. The minimum number of seats in each country is six and the maximum is 96”<sup>6</sup>.

The research aims to x-ray the evolution of this type of election in Romania, from 2007 to the present. The basis from which it started is quantitative research, through statistical data and comparative graphics that aim to create a clear picture of voting participation and the results obtained in the five voting polls that our country has gone through since joining the European Union.

**Table 1.**

The number of MEPs from România

Year	2007	2009	2014	2019	2024
MEPs	35	33	32	33	33

Source: author

Romania had the first MEPs appointed by the Romanian Parliament. They fulfilled a double mandate – parliamentarians in the domestic legislative forum and

<sup>4</sup> Cezar Avram, Roxana Radu, *Drepturile socio-economice ale cetățenilor europeni*, in “Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques”, no. 21–22, 2009, pp. 97–98.

<sup>5</sup> Mihaela Bărbieru, *A Critical Assessment of Political Party Performance in the Elections for European Parliament in Dolj County Romania on May 25, 2014*, in “Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques”, no. 44, 2014, pp. 135–136; European Union, *Tratatul de la Maastricht privind Uniunea Europeană*, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=LEGISUM:xy0026>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*. For the 2024-2029 legislature, Germany is the Union state with the most MEP seats (96), and the states with the fewest seats are Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta (6 each). Romania has 33 places and ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the hierarchy, after Germany (96), France (81), Italy (76), Spain (61) and Poland (53).

representatives of our country in the European Parliament from January 1, 2007 until the organization of the first elections. On December 20, 2006, the Chamber of Deputies adopted a legislative proposal for the organization and conduct of the EP elections, which stipulated, among other things, that the duration of the electoral campaign should be 30 days, the existence of a 5% threshold, a blocked list and the necessary of 200,000 signatures to be able to run. The decree for the promulgation of the Law was signed on January 16, 2007 by the President of Romania<sup>7</sup>.

A member of the European Union for 17 years, Romania had its first elections for the European Parliament in 2007, on November 25, simultaneously with a referendum organized by the president at that time, Traian Băsescu, regarding the introduction of voting in electoral constituencies. It should be noted that these first elections were for an incomplete mandate, given our country's accession to the EU on January 1, 2007. The initial date was set for May 13, but Prime Minister Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu proposed, on March 12, postponing the elections, considering that “his call for a European electoral campaign held in the spirit of the Romanians' real agenda was ignored”<sup>8</sup>. Through an emergency ordinance, the Executive decided, on the same day, to postpone the date of the elections for the last quarter of the year, specifying that the conduct of the elections had to be carried out in optimal conditions, “and they were not held at that time”<sup>9</sup>. On August 22, the Government fixed the date of the elections for November, after five judges were appointed in February who were to be part of the Central Electoral Bureau, later completed with four other members, representatives of non-parliamentary political parties, political alliances and pre-electoral alliances. Thirteen parties and an independent candidate entered the race, and the European Parliament seats reserved for our country were 35. Citizens with the right to vote registered in the permanent electoral lists for these elections were 18,224,597, and the turnout was by 29.47% (5,370,171 voters)<sup>10</sup>. 19,957 voters were present in the diaspora<sup>11</sup>. The parties that obtained mandates for the European Parliament, according to the results communicated by the Central Electoral Office on November 28, 2007, were PD, PSD, PNL, PLD, UDMR and Laszlo Tokes, an independent candidate<sup>12</sup>.

After counting the votes, the ranking of the parties that sent MEPs to the European Parliament placed PD in first place with 13 mandates (28.81%), followed

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<sup>7</sup> 2014 PE Alegeri europarlamentare 2007, in “Agerpres”, available at <https://www.agerpres.ro/europarlamentare-2014-documentare/2014/04/25/2014-pe-alegeri-europarlamentare-2007-08-55-03>

<sup>8</sup> Alegerile europarlamentare din România, anul 2007, in “Agerpres”, available at <https://www.agerpres.ro/flux-documentare/2024/05/20/alegerile-europarlamentare-din-romania-anul-2007--1296914>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/39/turnout>

<sup>11</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/39/results?division=diaspora>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

by PSD with 10 mandates (23.11%), PNL with 6 mandates (13, 44%), PLD with 3 mandates (7.78%), UDMR with 2 mandates (5.52%) and independent Laszlo Tokes (3.44%). Analyzing the MEPs elected in November 2007, we noticed that thirteen of them revalidated their mandates received in January<sup>13</sup>.

The next elections for the European Parliament took place in 2009 and were the first elections for a full mandate, in which Romania participated along with the other member states. The number of mandates assigned to our country, according to the Treaty of Nice, was 33 MEPs, resulting from the redistribution of the 783 seats among the member countries of the Union. The elections took place between June 4-7 at the Union level and on June 7 at the national level. Six political parties (PDL, PNL, UDMR, PNȚCD, PRM, Forța Civică), an electoral alliance (PSD+PC) and two independent candidates (Elena Băsescu and Pavel Abraham) entered the electoral race. 18,197,316 were registered on the permanent electoral lists, and the turnout was 27.67%, which meant 5,035,299 voters<sup>14</sup>. 14,330 voters were present in the diaspora<sup>15</sup>. The formations that entered the European Parliament were the PSD+PC Alliance with 11 mandates, the PDL with 10 mandates, the PNL with 5 mandates, the UDMR with 3 mandates, the PRM with 3 mandates and Elena Băsescu, an independent candidate<sup>16</sup>.

Comparing the two polls, we see little difference in turnout, about two percent less in 2009 than in 2007.

On May 25, 2014, the 3rd ballot of the European Parliament elections was held after Romania's entry into the EU<sup>17</sup>. 751 MEPs were appointed, and Romania got 32 MEPs. The registered political formations were 15 (parties and alliances) and 8 independent candidates<sup>18</sup>. 18,221,061 were registered on the permanent electoral lists, and 5,911,794 voters participated in the vote<sup>19</sup>. From the diaspora, 30,248 voters<sup>20</sup> participated in the vote. There is an increase in voting participation compared to the previous rounds, reaching a turnout of 32.44%. The results designated the Alliance PSD+UNPR+PC with 16 mandates, PNL with 6 mandates,

<sup>13</sup> *Alegerile europarlamentare din România, anul 2007*, in "Agerpres", available at <https://www.agerpres.ro/flux-documentare/2024/05/20/alegerile-europarlamentare-din-romania-anul-2007--1296914>

<sup>14</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/31/results>

<sup>15</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/31/results?division=diaspora>

<sup>16</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/31/results>

<sup>17</sup> It was the 8<sup>th</sup> election at the level of the European Union since the first elections in 1979 and took place between 22 and 25 May 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Independent candidates: Mircea Diaconu, Corina Ungureanu, Danut Liga, Pericle Iulian Capsali, Paul Parea, Peter Costea, Constantin Filip Titian and Valentin Daeanu. For more details, see Biroul Electoral Central, available at [https://www.mae.ro/sites/default/files/file/2014/alegeri\\_europarlamentare/2014.04.17\\_pv\\_503.pdf](https://www.mae.ro/sites/default/files/file/2014/alegeri_europarlamentare/2014.04.17_pv_503.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/16/results>

<sup>20</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/16/results?division=diaspora>

PDL with 5 mandates, UDMR with 2 mandates, PMP with 2 mandates and the independent Mircea Diaconu<sup>21</sup>.

In 2019, the elections for the European Parliament took place on May 26. The candidacies of 13 parties and alliances and 3 independent candidates were validated<sup>22</sup> for 33 mandates. 18,267,256 citizens with the right to vote were registered on the permanent electoral lists and 9,352,472 voted, the percentage being 51.2%<sup>23</sup>. The presence in the diaspora was 295,248 voters<sup>24</sup>. The elections took place at the same time as a referendum on justice called by Klaus Iohannis. Following the results, PNL won 10 mandates, PSD 9 mandates, USR-PLUS 8, and PRO Romania two mandates, PMP two mandates and UDMR two. It should also be mentioned that in July, at the opening of the European Parliament, 32 MEPs went from Romania, the 33rd going to confirm Brexit and the official exit of Great Britain from the EU<sup>25</sup>.

The 2024 European Parliament elections were the last such elections to date. They took place on June 9 in Romania and June 4-9 at the level of the European Union. 9 political parties, 3 electoral alliances and 4 independent candidates were admitted. 18,025,329 voters were registered on the permanent electoral lists, and the turnout was 9,215,201 voters, which in percentage terms represents 51.12%<sup>26</sup>. 215,979 voters from the diaspora came to the polls<sup>27</sup>. The results designated the Electoral Alliance PSD-PNL with 19 parliamentary seats (48.55%), AUR with 6 seats (14.93%), ADU (USR-PMP-Forța Dreptei) with 3 seats (8.71%), UDMR with two seats (6.48%), SOS Romania with two seats (5.03%) and the independent Nicolae Ștefănuță (3.08%)<sup>28</sup>.

The European Parliament elections are classified as elections of secondary importance, and the participation in voting at the level of the community space is lower

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<sup>21</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/16/results>

<sup>22</sup> Independent candidates: Gregoriana Tudoran, George Simion and Petre Costea. For more details, see: *Au fost stabiliți candidații la alegerile europarlamentare 2019*, in “Digi24”, available at <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/au-fost-stabilitii-candidatii-la-alegerile-europarlamentare-2019-noua-partide-si-un-independent-1108942>

<sup>23</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/4/turnout>

<sup>24</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/4/turnout?division=diaspora>

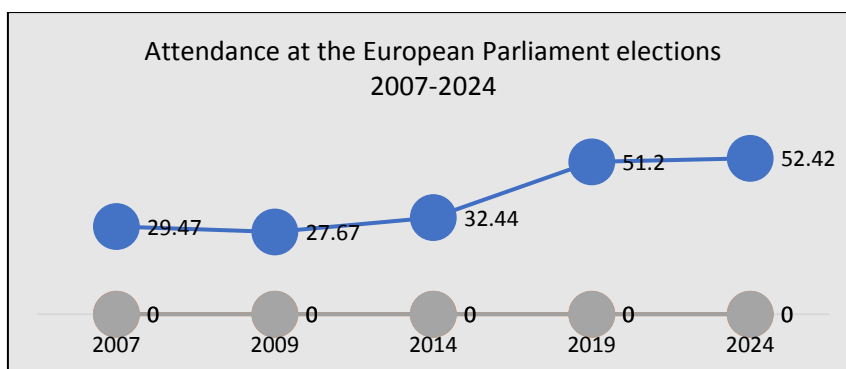
<sup>25</sup> In this situation we find Victor Negrescu, PSD MEP. Thus, until the official exit of Great Britain from the EU, Romania had 32 mandates, later 33. For more details, see *Europarlamentare 2019. Rezultate finale. PNL, 10 mandate, PSD, 9 mandate, USR-PLUS, 8, iar PMP, ProRomânia și UDMR, câte două*, in “Europa Libera”, available at <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/europarlamentare-2019-rezultate-finale-pnl-10-mandate-psd-9-mandate-usr-8-iar-pmp-prorom%C3%A2nia-%C8%99i-udmr-c%C3%A2te-dou%C4%83/29979241.html>

<sup>26</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/118/results>

<sup>27</sup> Commit Global. Rezultate vot, available at <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/118/results?division=diaspora>

<sup>28</sup> *Rezultatele finale ale alegerilor europarlamentare. Cine sunt românii care vor intra în Parlamentul European*, in “Digi24”, available at <https://www.digi24.ro/alegeri-europarlamentare-2024/bec-anunta-rezultatele-finale-ale-alegerilor-europarlamentare-2831399>

compared to the presidential or general elections of the states. For Romania, from the analysis of the attached graph (Graph 1), we notice that a lower turnout was recorded at the beginning of this type of election, in the first decade after accession. Thus, for the first elections, although they were accompanied by a referendum, the turnout was only 29.47%, so that five years later it was even lower, at only 27.67%. A considerably higher turnout is recorded in 2019 and 2024, but in both cases the elections were held together or combined with a referendum (2019) and local elections (2024).



**Graph 1.** Attendance at the European Parliament elections 2007–2024.

**Source:** author, on the basis of <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/16/results>.

At the level of the European Union, the year 2024 was a year full of electoral events, and for Romania it meant the holding of all forms of elections: local, European parliamentary, presidential and parliamentary elections. The specificity of the June 9 elections is that they were organized simultaneously with the local elections. It was the first time that they were held in this form, but Romania was not the only one that chose this merger option. Thus, the European parliamentary elections were combined with the local ones in Romania, Hungary, Germany, Ireland, Malta, Italy, with the national ones in Bulgaria, and in Belgium three types of elections were combined: European, federal and regional<sup>29</sup>. Voting by mail, online or by proxy was not possible in Romania for the European elections in June.

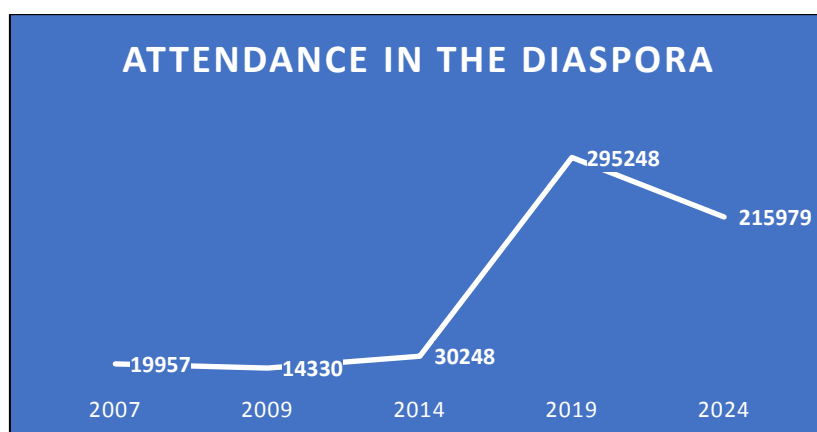
Romania is a state with a large diaspora<sup>30</sup>, most Romanian citizens outside the borders being concentrated in the states in the west of the continent. Analyzing the

<sup>29</sup> Răzvan Boboc, *Corespondență de la Bruxelles: Astăzi, belgienii merg la urne pentru trei tipuri de alegeri. Tinerii de 16 și 17 ani votează pentru prima dată*, în “Euroenews”, available at <https://www.euronews.ro/articole/corespondenta-de-la-bruxelles-astazi-belgienii-merg-la-urne-pentru-trei-tipuri-de>

<sup>30</sup> Alexandra Porumbescu, *Migration Policies in the European Union: Espoused Perspectives and Practices-In-Use*, in “Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques”, no. 46, 2015, pp. 165–175.

statistical data provided by the specialized platforms, but especially analyzing the voting participation, we observe the growing interest that this category shows in the voting process. Among the types of elections showing high interest, the presidential ones ranked first every time. However, from the adjacent graph we can see that interest has also increased for the European Parliament elections, with a big jump starting from 2019. Practically, from graphs 1 and 2 we can see that the upward trend of voter turnout and the interest shown for this type of elections is maintained both on the national territory, as well as in the diaspora.

Electoral campaigns for this type of election are not different, but are part of the already known electoral landscape. Traditional techniques merge with new technologies, where the electoral debate is increasingly supported. Candidates make a lot of use of online platforms to increase their visibility and get in touch with voters, the political message being multiplied by well-crafted strategies. It is possible that in the future electoral strategies will be built exclusively on the basis of social networks and the online environment<sup>31</sup>.



**Graph 2.** Attendance in the diaspora.

**Source:** author, on the basis of <https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/16/results>.

An EP press release from September 2019, based on a Eurobarometer survey commissioned by the EP in June, shows that the 2019 European Parliament elections saw a high turnout across the Union, driven by an increase in the participation of young

<sup>31</sup> Mihaela Bărbieru, *Adapting political communication to technology. Case study: evolutionary aspects on social networks in Romania*, in "Swedish Journal of Romanian Studies", vol. 5, nr. 2, 2022, pp. 117–136; Idem, *Criteria for political communication and mass influence in the Internet age*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane "C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor", no. XXI, 2020, pp. 129–137; Ștefan Vlăduțescu, *Syncretism and communication*, in "Social Sciences and Education Research Review", vol. 10, no. 1, 2023, pp. 249–252; Ștefan Vlăduțescu, Georgiana Camelia Stănescu, *Environmental Sustainability of Metaverse: Perspectives from Romanian Developers*, in "Sustainability", vol. 15, no. 15, 2023, p. 11704.

people to vote: “The results of the post-election Eurobarometer survey, one of the most comprehensive public quantitative surveys carried out after the last European elections, show that the increase in the number of participants was largely fueled by the young generation across the European Union. In particular, young citizens under 25 (+14 percentage points) as well as young people between 25 and 39 (+12 percentage points) turned out to vote in greater numbers than in the past. The participation rate in the European elections was 50.6%, the highest since 1994. 19 member states saw increases in participation compared to 2014, notably Poland, Romania, Spain, Austria, Hungary and Germany, as well as Slovakia and The Czech Republic, where voter turnout is traditionally very low. At the same time, participation fell in only eight countries, by less than 3 percentage points. Voting is mandatory in five countries – Belgium, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Greece”<sup>32</sup>. From the same document we also note that “The results show that European voters in 2019 were also motivated by an increased sense of civic duty, an additional feeling that their vote can make a difference, as well as strong voter support for the EU. On average across the EU, the economy and economic growth (44%) as well as climate change (37%) are the main factors influencing voter turnout. Human rights and democracy (37%), the way the EU should act in the future (36%) and immigration (34%) also provided additional motivation. Although the economy was the most important issue for voters in 16 member states, climate change was the main factor in eight countries”<sup>33</sup>.

In conclusion, the elections for the European Parliament are considered second type elections throughout the European Union, not only in Romania. At the same time, however, we notice that there is interest and turnout for the last two elections in our country, but the clarification is that they were done together with a referendum (in 2019) and local elections (in 2024). If in the future European parliamentary elections (2029) the attendance remains as high, but on the condition that they are not linked to another type of elections, it is possible to witness the manifestation of interest on the part of the electorate and their removal from the second zone and positioning, as perceived importance, next to local, national and presidential elections.

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<sup>32</sup> Actualitate. Parlamentul European. Alegerile europene 2019: o participare record stimulată de electoratul tânăr, 24.09.2019, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20190923IPR61602/alegerile-europene-2019-o-participare-record-stimulata-de-electoratul-tanar>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.



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