



Romania

Local Elections Update

June 2, 2004

Local elections will be held in Romania on Sunday, June 6. Voters will cast ballots at more than 16,000 polling stations across the country to elect mayors and municipal counselors. For mayoral races in which no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote, a second round will be organized between top contenders on June 20. The local elections will be a political barometer as Romania heads toward parliamentary and presidential elections in November 2004. The elections will test the strength of two opposition parties as they combine forces against a strong ruling party. Polls show a conflicted electorate, concerned with government corruption and Romania's future, but divided over whether a credible political alternative to the ruling party exists.

NDI is producing an occasional series of reports about Romania's local, parliamentary, and presidential elections. This report highlights political developments, campaign events and efforts by NDI partners to engage political parties and civic groups on community issues surrounding the local elections.

Election Administration

On May 8, the official campaign for the local elections began. Seven judges of the Supreme Court and 11 representatives of parties competing in the local elections were appointed to the provisional Central Election Commission (CEC) on April 19. Under pressure from the Pro-Democracy Association (PDA) and other civic groups, the government recently created a permanent election bureau, as it had been legally mandated to accomplish by January 2004. The bureau is expected to be operational for the parliamentary and presidential elections.

Political Parties

Of the 45 parties running in the local elections, the major parties competing are the following:

- Social Democratic Party (PSD) (www.psd.ro)
- National Christian Democratic Peasant Party (PNTCD) (www.pntcd.ro)
- National Liberal Party (PNL) (www.pnl.ro)

- People's Action Party (AP) (www.actiunea.ro)
- Democratic Party (PD) (www.pd.ro)
- Greater Romania Party (PRM) (www.romare.ro)
- Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) (www.rmdsz.ro)
- Humanist Party of Romania (PUR) (www.pur.ro)
- Union for Reconstruction of Romania (URR) (www.urr.ro)

The opposition parties Democratic Party and National Liberal Party formed the Alliance for Justice and Truth (DA) in September 2003 and will run common party lists for the local elections in certain localities, while running jointly countrywide for the parliamentary and presidential elections. For the local elections, party list voting will determine the allocation of municipal counselor positions.

According to the Center for Urban and Regional Sociology, almost 75% of Romanians believe that another party should come to power through this year's elections. Paradoxically, the same poll revealed the governing Social Democratic Party would claim a majority of votes in the local and parliamentary elections.

This and other polls suggest that, in the local elections, PSD would obtain approximately 40% of the votes, followed by PNL 17-19%, PRM 13-14%, PD 10-11%, UDMR 6%, PUR 2-5%, PNTCD 1-2%, AP 1%, and other parties 3%. Although not mentioned in any polls, the Union for Reconstruction of Romania (URR) is a new party worth watching. A significant 35% of eligible voters polled were still undecided.

Campaign Events

- Candidates for mayor of Bucharest to debate on national television - Romanian Foreign Minister and PSD candidate for Bucharest mayor, Mircea Geoana, will face current mayor and PD leader Traian Basescu in a televised debate this week. The latest opinion polls show support for Basescu increasing to 44%, while Geoana's support has slipped to 37%.
- Voters in Cluj excited about local competition - Public opinion polls in the city of Cluj suggest that the controversial mayoral incumbent, Gheorghe Funar (PRM), is unlikely to make the second round. Competition between Interior Minister Ioan Rus and DA Alliance candidate Emil Boc for city hall has stirred the interest of voters: an unusually high 80% of the eligible voters say they will vote on June 6.
- Local government officials under fire for involvement in the campaign - The President of the Local Administration Committee in the Chamber of Deputies, Ioan Oltean (PD) has written a letter to Prime Minister Adrian Nastase requesting disciplinary measures against county prefects who have been linked to activity in support of PSD. Oltean called for the resignation of the prefect from Bistrita Nasaud for his participation in many rallies throughout the county in support of PSD candidates. This is not an isolated case: prefects in Mehedinti, Sibiu, Alba, Maramures and Olt are accused of similar violations of the election law, whose article

115 strictly forbids prefects and sub-prefects, who are appointed by government, from any involvement in electoral campaigns. In response to these allegations, the CEC recently decided to pass responsibility to the County Election Commissions.

Monitoring the Election Campaign

- Election monitors prepare to observe balloting - The Pro-Democracy Association is preparing to field 1,300 monitors in rural areas throughout the country and several hundred monitors in major cities. The Association plans to release a post-election report with its findings. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) will not field international monitors for the local elections, but expected to field monitors for the November parliamentary and presidential elections.
- Pro-Democracy releases findings on campaign spending - The Pro-Democracy Association is monitoring funds spent on campaign advertising in 71 nationwide publications, 252 local newspapers in all 40 judets, or counties, as well as billboards in Bucharest, Bacau, Brasov, Constanta, Cluj, Ramnicu Valcea and Timisoara.

PDA announced its first set of findings for campaign spending in Bucharest. Several candidates have spent beyond the legal limit of \$41,270, including the incumbent mayor of the city's Sector 5, or fifth district, a former PSD candidate now running as an independent. Conversely, the PSD mayoral candidate in the same district has not spent any money on public advertising. Nationwide, PSD is spending the most on newspaper advertising, followed by PUR. More information can be found at www.apd.ro.

- The Institute for Public Policy releases report on politics and use of public funds - A May 17 press release by the Institute for Public Policy in Bucharest concludes that politicians misuse public funds and goods due to a lack of a thorough control by relevant institutions. The press release points to the main mechanisms "through which public resources have been and continue to be deliberately misappropriated" which include funneling public funds through businesses or NGOs, press bias due to financial incentives, the granting of social benefits with an electoral purpose, using public property for political purposes, and electoral campaigning through festivals and celebrations of national holidays. More information on this topic and the report can be found in Romanian at www.ipp.ro.
- Protests against violations of campaign law - During the first week of the electoral campaign, PDA officially protested illegal electoral advertising practices in Bucharest and has asked the Court of Accounts to take action. The election law states that all campaign posters must include the name of the party and the printing company. As a result, one of Bucharest's district mayors, Vasile Mihalache (PSD), fined himself for illegal posters, although they were not removed.

NDI Civic Partners Shine Light on Election Issues

- NDI's civic partner in Timis county, the Association for Promotion of Women (APOWER), organized its first candidate forum in Timisoara on May 12 to discuss domestic violence and why it should be a priority for the city's mayoral candidates. Most candidates participated, including incumbent mayor, Gheorghe Ciuhandu (PNTCD).



APOWER chairs the candidate forum in Timisoara

- Another NDI civic partner, the Association for Community Development – Panaghia, held its first candidate forum in a village near Craiova with all mayoral candidates. For the first time, citizens asked questions and discussed local issues in a structured setting with candidates.
- In Lupeni (Hunedoara county), eight of 10 candidates including the incumbent mayor attended a citizens' forum organized by DEEP, a local youth NGO, that attracted 150 citizens. Parties represented were PSD, PUR, PD, PNL, UDMR, PRM, Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR), and the Romanian Environmentalist Party (PER). Candidates were allotted time to state their platforms and fielded questions from the audience and from each other.
- NDI's civic partner ARTI, a youth NGO, organized the first candidate forum on youth issues in Craiova on May 26. Five out of the seven invited mayoral candidates attended. Candidates were eager to state their interest in young people and their problems and promised to communicate with youth NGOs once elected, a positive step to increase cooperation between political leaders and the communities they serve.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide, has assisted Romanian political parties and civic organizations since 1990. With support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy, NDI is promoting interaction between civic groups and political parties at the local level and helping to build a competitive multiparty system.

This report was compiled by NDI staff. NDI's Romania program is supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). For more information, please contact Edmund Rhoads in Washington at (202) 728-5500 or NDI's office in Romania at (4021) 212-5658 or visit www.ndi.org.