

Surprise in Romania where Klaus Johannis wins the presidential election

Corinne Deloy

Results

Abstract :

To everyone's surprise and contrary to forecasts, Klaus Johannis (National Liberal Party, PNL), Mayor of Sibiu and member of the Democratic Forum of Germans of Romania (FDGR) won the second round of the presidential election that took place on 16th November in Romania. The right-wing opposition candidate won 54% of the vote against 46% for Victor Ponta, outgoing Prime Minister and chair of the Social Democratic Party (PSD). The difference in votes between the two men (8 percentage points) is unusual in Romania where presidential elections are often very tightly run.

Victor Ponta came out ahead after the first round on 2nd November last with 40.44% of the vote against 30.37% for Klaus Johannis.

Klaus Johannis's victory marks a real change for Romania which has been run by the post-Communist Nomenklatura since the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu in December 1989.

Turnout was high and totalled 61.5%, i.e. 3.48 points more in comparison with the second round of the previous presidential election on 22nd November 2009 and 8.33 points more in comparison with the first round.

"Everything will depend on the electoral turnout in urban areas and abroad – they were appalled by the poor organisation of the election on 2nd November," stressed Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, lecturer in Political Science at the Hertie University of Berlin the day after the first round. *"If 4 to 5% more people vote in the urban areas in the second round Klaus Johannis will win the presidential election," she concluded. "If the electorate in the major towns turn out, who are more for Klaus Johannis, then he has a chance,"* stressed the director of the Romanian Centre for European Policy, Cristian Ghinea.

High turnout, notably on the part of expats and young people indeed showed that the polls were wrong, leading to victory on the part of the opposition. Traian Basescu was elected president of the Republic for the second time in 2009 mainly thanks to expatriate Romanians.

Many Romanians living abroad were not able to vote in the first round on 2nd November. Only 160,056 of them went to ballot because an insufficient number of polling stations had been opened (294 in all and only 160,000 voting slips printed for around 4 million voters), notably in France, the UK, Germany and in Belgium.

Between rounds demonstrations were organised in Bucharest and in the towns of Cluj, Timisoara, Sibiu, Brasov, Orada and Constanta in solidarity with expatriate Romanians who had not been able to fulfil their civic duty. On 10th November Foreign Minister Titus Corlatean (PSD) who was in charge of organising the voting procedure for Romanians abroad, had to resign from office. He denied accusations brought against him explaining that legislation prohibited the ministry from establishing more polling stations, which was denied by the Central Electoral Office. The minister did however guarantee that steps would be taken to ensure that voting would take place smoothly in the embassies during the second round: raising the number of voting booths, possibility of downloading anti-fraud forms online, therefore before arrival at the polling station, (every voter had to declare that he had not voted in another place).

Titus Corlatean was replaced by Teodor Melecanu, former head of diplomacy (1992-1996) and also a presidential candidate (0.56% of the vote in the first round).

According to the polls, 46% of the Romanians living abroad voted for Klaus Johannis and 15.8% for Victor Ponta on 2nd November. *"It is sad to see that a candidate can profit from his public office to prevent citizens from exercising their constitutional right. Victor Ponta is a threat to democracy;"* declared Klaus Johannis after the

Presidential election in Romania
2nd and 16th November 2014

first round. Sergiu Miscoiu, an analyst at the Centre for Political Studies and International Research (CESPRI) in Cluj, maintained that Victor Ponta had made “a serious mistake” by ostracising the expats. Indeed this decision only strengthened solidarity between Romanians.

“Dear Romanians, you are heroes. 25 years after the revolution people were obliged to go out into the streets to defend their right to vote. I thank the Romanians diaspora who queued for hours in order to vote,” declared Klaus Johannis after the 2nd round. 379,000 Romanians living abroad, i.e. twice the number that voted in the first round did so on 16th November.

Turnout was high and totalled 61.5%, i.e. 3.48 points more in comparison with the second round of the previous presidential election on 22nd November 2009 and 8.33 points more in comparison with the first round.

“Everything will depend on the electoral turnout in urban areas and abroad – they were appalled by the poor organisation of the election on 2nd November,” stressed Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, lecturer in Political Science at the Hertie University of Berlin the day after the first round. “If 4 to 5% more people vote in the urban areas in the second round Klaus Johannis will win the presidential election,” she concluded. “If the electorate in the major towns turn out, who are more for Klaus Johannis, then he has a chance,” stressed the director of the Romanian Centre for European Policy, Cristian Ghinea.

High turnout, notably on the part of expats and young people indeed showed that the polls were wrong, leading to victory on the part of the opposition. Traian Basescu was elected president of the Republic for the second time in 2009 mainly thanks to expatriate Romanians.

Many Romanians living abroad were not able to vote in the first round on 2nd November. Only 160,056 of them went to ballot because an insufficient number of polling stations had been opened (294 in all and only 160,000 voting slips printed for around 4 million voters), notably in France, the UK, Germany and in Belgium.

Between rounds demonstrations were organised in Bucharest and in the towns of Cluj, Timisoara, Sibiu, Brasov, Orada and Constanta in solidarity with expatriate Romanians who had not been able to fulfil their civic duty. On 10th November Foreign Minister Titus Corlatean (PSD) who was in charge of organising the voting procedure for Romanians abroad, had to resign from office. He denied accusations brought against him explaining that legislation prohibited the ministry from establishing more polling stations, which was denied by the Central Electoral Office. The minister did however guarantee that steps would be taken to ensure that voting would take place smoothly in the embassies during the second round: raising the number of voting booths, possibility of downloading anti-fraud forms online, therefore before arrival at the polling station, (every voter had to declare that he had not voted in another place).

Titus Corlatean was replaced by Teodor Melecanu, former head of diplomacy (1992-1996) and also a presidential candidate (0.56% of the vote in the first round).

According to the polls, 46% of the Romanians living abroad voted for Klaus Johannis and 15.8% for Victor Ponta on 2nd November. “It is sad to see that a candidate can profit from his public office to prevent citizens from exercising their constitutional right. Victor Ponta is a threat to democracy;” declared Klaus Johannis after the first round. Sergiu Miscoiu, an analyst at the Centre for Political Studies and International Research (CESPRI) in Cluj, maintained that Victor Ponta had made “a serious mistake” by ostracising the expats. Indeed this decision only strengthened solidarity between Romanians.

“Dear Romanians, you are heroes. 25 years after the revolution people were obliged to go out into the streets to defend their right to vote. I thank the Romanians diaspora who queued for hours in order to vote,” declared Klaus Johannis after the 2nd round. 379,000 Romanians living abroad, i.e. twice the number that voted in the first round did so on 16th November.

Results of the Presidential election on 2nd and 16th November in Romania

Turnout: 53.17% (1st round) and 61.50% (2nd round)

| Candidates | No of votes won (1st round) | % of votes won (1st round) | % of votes won (2nd round) |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Klaus Johannis (National Liberal Party, PNL) | 2 881 406 | 30,37 | 54 |
| Victor Ponta (Social Democratic Party PSD) | 3 836 093 | 40,44 | 46 |

| | | | |
|--|---------|------|--|
| Calin Popescu-Tariceanu (Liberal Reformist Party) | 508 572 | 5,36 | |
| Elena Udrea (People's Movement) | 493 376 | 5,20 | |
| Monica Macovei (independent) | 421 648 | 4,44 | |
| Dan Diaconescu (People's Party-Dan Diaconescu, PP-DD) | 382 526 | 4,03 | |
| Corneliu Vadim Tudor (Grand Romania Party, PRM) | 349 416 | 3,68 | |
| Hunor Kelemen (Democratic Union of Hungarians of Romania, UDMR) | 329 727 | 3,47 | |
| Zsolt Szilagyi (Party of the Hungarians of Transylvania, EMNP) | 104 131 | 1,09 | |
| Teodor Melescanu (independent) | 53 146 | 0,56 | |
| Gheorghe Funar (independent) | 45 405 | 0,47 | |
| William Brinza (Romanian Ecologist Party, PER) | 43 194 | 0,45 | |
| Constantin Rotaru (Socialist Alliance Party, PAS) | 28 805 | 0,30 | |
| Mirel Mircea Amaritei (Prodemo Party) | 7 895 | 0,08 | |

Source : <http://www.bec2014.ro/rezultate/>

"Thanks to you another Romania will now be born - the Romania we want, free of conflict and vengeance; it will be based on your vote and what you want," declared Klaus Johannis, whose slogan was "The Romania where things are done well". "I am going to do to Romania what I did in Sibiu," he promised. "My view of things is that Romania is a Western country," he added saying that "what is happening today in Hungary is not democracy and things are not going in the right direction." Finally the new president of the Republic promised to strengthen the rule of law and introduce a totally independent judicial system.

"We are a democratic country. The people are always right," said Prime Minister Ponta as he learned of his defeat, which he acknowledged. He did not hesitate provide nationalist (as stood against a rival nicknamed the "German" due to his origins) and also religious overtones to his campaign ("He who believes in God is good. Only he can take care of others" he declared as he started his electoral campaign).

Confident of his victory Victor Ponta had already chosen who would take his place as Prime Minister – i.e. the leader of the Senate, former Prime Minister (2004-2008) and also candidate in the presidential election Calin Popescu-Tariceanu (Liberal Reformist Party). "We have

learnt enough not to lost the presidential election for the third time," he also liked to repeat.

However confidence was not enough for the Prime Minister, who did say that for the time being he had no reason to resign.

Aged 56, Klaus Johannis originally comes from Sibiu (Hermannstadt in German), a town of which he became mayor in 2000 – the first of German origin in a Romanian town since Alfred Dörr, Mayor of Sibiu from 1940 and 1945. Elected regularly back into office (he won a fourth mandate with 78.4% of the vote in the local elections on 10th and 24th June 2012), Mr Johannis, a member of the German minority of Romania, is a symbol of success: indeed he has completely transformed the town, as he has renovated infrastructures and restored the historic centre. Since he has been in office Sibiu has experienced true economic success and has become a privileged tourist destination chosen as European Cultural Capital in 2007, when Romania joined the European Union. "Sibiu is the living proof that in Romania we can have a healthy, effective civil service, that we can implement an honest policy without a scandal, without insulting anyone, that we can encourage investment that creates prosperity. If we have done it in Sibiu we can do it across Romania," repeats Klaus Johannis.

Presidential election in Romania 2nd and 16th November 2014

"Who would have thought that I, a teacher with a German name (...) would find myself one day before tens of thousands of people to present them with my vision of Romania? It is the first time since the fall of communism 25 years ago that a candidate belonging to an ethnic minority has been appointed to run for president. This proves that Romanian society is mature. We cannot ask for the respect of others if we do not respect ourselves," indicated the Mayor of Sibiu at the beginning of his electoral campaign.

Since the 12th century Transylvania has been home to a large German minority which came to defend the eastern frontier of the Hungarian kingdom against incursions by the Tatars and later the Turks on the invitation of King Geza II of Hungary. In 1930 there were 745,000 Romanians of German origin, now there are only 30,000 of them. During his time in power Nicolae Ceausescu "sold" many German Romanians to the German Federal Republic. A student who was embarking on his studies was "sold" for 5,500 Deutsche Mark (2,700€); a student who was nearly qualified 7000 Deutsche Mark (3,500€) and a graduate, 11,000 Deutsche Mark (5 500 €). Romania is said to have earned more than one billion Deutsche Mark with these transactions. After the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 many German Romanians left the country en masse.

"Romania is a positive exception thanks to its choice of president who is member of an ethnic minority which comprises some 60,000 members," declared political expert Radu Alexandru. We should note that the new Head of State is Protestant, whilst most Romanians are Orthodox Christians.

A graduate in physics from the University of Babes-Bolyai in Cluj, Klaus Johannis first taught physics before becoming a primary school inspector. He joined the

Democratic Forum of Germans of Romania (FGDR) in 1990. His name was mentioned for the first time in 2009 in replacement of Emil Boc (Liberal Democratic Party, PDL), as Prime Minister but the President of the Republic, Traian Basescu opposed this choice. Klaus Johannis joined the National Liberal party in 2013. On 28th June 2014 he took over as the party's leader from Crin Antonescu, who resigned from office after the party's performance in the European elections on 25th May.

After the merger of the party with the Liberal Democratic Party Klaus Johannis chose to represent both movements which came under the label "Liberal Christian Alliance" (Alianta Crestin Liberal, ACL), in the Presidential election on 2nd and 16th November.

The party that will probably be formed at the end of this year on the basis of the two main right-wing movements is due to retain its name as the "National Liberal Party".

Klaus Johannis will take over from Traian Basescu on 22nd December – i.e. 25 years to the day after the Romanian revolution of 1989 at the Cotroceni Palace, the residence of the President of the Republic in Bucarest.

"Klaus Johannis will use his presidential influence to undermine the majority held by Victor Ponta's government in parliament," stressed Tsveta Petrova, an analyst with the Eurasia Group, who, before the election said that the new head of State was probably more supportive of business than Victor Ponta.

The new head of State has promised that *"the difficult years of cohabitation between the head of government and the president of the Republic Traian Basescu will not repeat themselves."* *"The head of State will have to be a counterweight to the strong left-wing majority in Parliament,"* stressed Cristian Ghinea, director of the Romanian Centre for European Policy.

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.