

# Social Democrat Prime Minister Victor Ponta, favourite in the Presidential election on Romania

Corinne Deloy

Analysis

**Abstract :**

18.3 million Romanians will be appointing their president on 2nd November next. If none of the 14 candidates running wins the absolute majority in the first round, a second will be organised on 16th November. Outgoing head of State Traian Basescu, who is ending his second term, is not allowed to stand for re-election.

The present Prime Minister Victor Ponta (Social Democratic Party PSD) is running favourite in the election. According to the most recent poll by CSCI he is due to win 42% of the vote ahead of Klaus Johannis with 37%. Calin Popescu-Tariceanu is due to come third with 9% of the vote, ahead of Elena Udrea (6%), Dan Diaconescu (5%), Kelemen Humor (4%), Monica Macovei (3%) and Cornelio Vadim Tudor (2%). Two-thirds of the Romanians (68%) said they were going to vote on 2nd November.

294 polling stations will be open abroad so that expat Romanians can vote. During the last presidential election on 22nd November and 6th December 2009 146,000 turned out to vote – a record number.

**THE CANDIDATES RUNNING**

In Romania the President of the Republic is elected for five years. All candidates to the supreme office have to be aged 35 at least and deliver a list of at least 200,000 voters' signatures in support of his bid. He must also swear that he did not work with the Securitate, the Romanian secret police under the Communist regime. The head of the Romanian State enjoys few powers. He appoints the Prime Minister "after consulting the party with the absolute majority in Parliament or, if there is no majority, with the parties represented in Parliament," (article 103-1 of the Constitution) and cannot dismiss him.

Romania has a bicameral parliament that is renewed

every four years within 41 constituencies using a mix majority system. The Upper Chamber, the Senate, has 143 members and the lower chamber, the Chamber of Deputies (Camera Deputatilor) 346. National minorities (Roma, Germans, Armenians, Italians, Croatians, Albanians, Serbs etc.) have a number of seats reserved for them in the Chamber of Deputies (18).

14 people are officially running for the presidential office:

- Victor Ponta (Social Democratic Party, PSD), Prime Minister since 7th May 2012 and Chairman of the Social Democratic Party since 21st February 2010;
- Klaus Johannis (National Liberal Party, PNL), Mayor of Sibiu, member of the Democratic Forum of Germans of Romania (FDGR) and supported by the Christian Liberal Alliance (ACL);
- Calin Popescu-Tariceanu (Liberal Reformist Party) present leader of the Senate and former Prime Minister (2004-2008);
- Dan Diaconescu (People's Party-Dan Diaconescu, PP-DD), former host of the Dan Diaconescu Direct show on TV channel OTV;
- Elena Udrea (People's Movement), former Regional and Tourism Minister (2009-2012) supported by outgoing President of the Republic Traian Basescu;
- Hunor Kelemen (Democratic Union of Hungarians of Romania, UDMR), present Culture Minister;
- Monica Macovei, member of the Liberal Democratic Party (PD-L) who is standing as an independent

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candidate, at present she is MEP and former Justice Minister (2004-2007);

- William Brinza (Romanian Ecologist Party, PER);
- Constantin Rotaru (Socialist Alliance Party, PAS);
- Corneliu Vadim Tudor (Grand Romania Party, PRM);
- Zsolt Szilagy (Hungarians of Transylvania People's Party EMNP);
- Mirela Mircela Amaritei (Prodemo Party);
- Teodor Melescanu, independent;
- Gheorghe Funar, independent.

### 2014, HAS THE TIME FOR THE LEFT COME?

Prime Minister Victor Ponta is supported by Romania's good growth figures (3.5% in 2013) and a slight decrease in unemployment (7%, July 2014). Economic issues are due to dominate the electoral campaign. The agency Fitch has maintained Bucharest's rating and indicated that it thinks that the country will succeed in reaching its goal of reducing the budgetary deficit to 2.2% of the GDP this year. A poll in June by CATI however has revealed that more than half of the Romanians (54%) think that their country is not going in the right direction.

In terms of foreign policy the Romanian head of government recently distanced himself from Vladimir Putin's Russia and suggested that Bucharest strengthen its ties with the USA.

"We have learnt enough not to lose the presidential election a third time," declared the Prime Minister. "My presidential programme includes one priority: Romania needs real change so that things that have been a source of division over the last few years disappear. By this I mean that we should bring Romanians together. This would be my main goal." Victor Ponta was officially appointed candidate during the extraordinary congress of his party on 12th September last in Alba Iulia. He launched his electoral campaign eight days later, on his 42nd birthday in the National Arena Stadium of Bucharest to an audience of 70,000. His programme is called "Victor Ponta – President- the Great Union of Romanians" – his slogan "Proud to be Romanian" and he says he wants to be president of his country in 2018 the year Romania celebrates the 100 years of the great union of 1918 (that year the Austro-Hungarian and Russian territories inhabited by Romanian speakers ie Bessarabia, Bucovina, Maramures, Crisana, Banat and

Transylvania joined the kingdom of Romania).

Finally he insisted on reassuring his fellow countrymen that if he wins there will no longer be any conflict between the country's president and the head of government [1]. The most recent event was parliament's bid to force the resignation of President of the Republic Traian Basescu whom some MPs deemed to "no longer enjoy the moral integrity required to embody legitimacy of the presidential office." This bid failed on 14th June since the text submitted to the MPs' vote did not win a majority vote.

The Prime Minister has the support of the National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR) led by Gabriel Oprea and the Conservative Party (PC) led by Daniel Constantin, two parties which are members of the government coalition he leads. He declared that he hoped to face Calin Popescu-Tariceanu in a second round on 16th November saying that facing Elena Udrea, Klaus Johannis or Monica Macovei would be the same as facing outgoing President Traian Basescu.

Seven Romanians out of 10 (70%) expect that Victor Ponta will win.

For the Romanian the right is still linked to an austerity policy undertaken by former Prime Minister (2008-2012) Emil Boc (Liberal Democratic Party, PD-L), supported by the President of the Republic Traian Basescu. The Romanian right also suffers due to its fragmentation. The parties are so divided that they spend more time quarrelling between themselves than with the left in office.

On 5th February 2011 the National Liberal Party (PNL) joined forces with Victor Ponta's Social Democratic Party, the National Union for the Progress of Romania and the Conservative Party within the Social Liberal Union. Three years later on 25th February 2014 the National Liberal party quit this union and joined the right-wing opposition after a fight between its leader Crin Antonescu and Victor Ponta about the government's composition.

After the European elections on 25th May the right was easily beaten by the Social Democrats: the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Liberal Party (PD-L) won 27.23% of the vote together (17 points less in comparison with 2009) against 37.6% for the Prime Minister's party. A few days later the National Liberal

1. The Romanians were called to vote on two occasions in referenda on the impeachment of their head of State Traian Basescu. On 19th May 2007 three quarters of the electorate (74.48%) chose to oppose this decision and on 29th July 2012 most Romanians called to vote for or against the Head of State's destitution didn't even turn out to vote. Only 46.13% voted whilst turnout of at least half of those registered was required for the consultation to be deemed valid.

Party merged with the Democratic Liberal Party and put forward a joint candidate for the Presidential election on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> November next. The two parties are running under the name "*Christian Liberal Alliance (Alianta Crestin Liberal, ACL)*". The party will probably be formed at the end of the year with the two main right-wing parties retaining the name of National Liberal Party.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> July the leader of the Senate Calin Popescu-Tariceanu opposed to the merger, as he was to the transfer of the National Liberal Party, previously a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) over to the European People's Party (EPP), announced the creation of the Liberal Reformist Party. He looks back to the Social Liberal Union and wants his party to draw closer to the Social Democratic Party.

The leader of the upper chamber is standing in the presidential election and hopes to win 20% of the vote in the first round so that he can stand against Victor Ponta on 16<sup>th</sup> November. His programme is called, "*Romania, the seventh power of Europe*". He places emphasis on three points: administrative and political reform, education and culture and finally demography. Calin Popescu-Tariceanu wants to encourage 3 million Romanians who have emigrated to other countries of Europe to return home.

Klaus Johannis, the interim leader of the National Liberal Party announced that he would be running for president on 11<sup>th</sup> August last. He will be representing the Christian Liberal Alliance. The Mayor of Sibiu (Hermannstadt), a town in Transylvania since 2000 (at present he is undertaking his fourth term in office as the town's mayor), Johannis is a symbol of success: indeed he has managed to transform his town completely by renewing infrastructures and by restoring its historic centre. Sibiu has experienced true economic success and has become a privileged tourist destination that was selected as European Capital of Culture in 2007, the year Romania joined the European Union. "*Sibiu is the living proof that in Romania it is possible to have a healthy and effective civil service, that it is possible to undertake honest, scandal free politics, that it*

*is possible to encourage investment which creates prosperity. If we have done it in Sibiu we can do it across Romania as a whole,"* declared Klaus Johannis.

*"Who would have thought that I, a teacher with a German name (...) would one day stand before thousands of people to present his vision of Romania? It is the first time since the fall of communism 25 years ago that a major political structure has a candidate who belongs to an ethnic minority appointed for the presidential office. This proves that Romanian society is mature. We cannot ask for the respect of others if we do not respect ourselves. In my vision of things Romania will be a western country,"* he also said.

Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century Transylvania has been home to a sizeable German minority which came to defend the eastern borders of the Hungarian kingdom against the Tatars and later from the Turks on the request of the King Geza II of Hungary. Romanians of German origin totalled 745,000 in 1930, today there are only 30,000. During his reign Nicolae Ceaucescu "sold" many German Romanians to the Federal Republic of Germany. A student just starting his studies was "sold" for 5,500 Deutsche Mark (2,700 €); a student ending his studies, 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 deals. After the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 German Romanians left the country en masse.

*"I want less show-time politics and more seriousness. You know me – I am a man who privileges action to the detriment of words, a man who keeps his promises (...) I am offering the Romanians a decade of prosperity and the rule of law,"* indicates Klaus Johannis, who in his programme entitled "*The Romania of things done well*" has made youth employment the reform of the education system, rapprochement with the EU and the USA and economic growth his priorities.

According to sociologist Barbu Mateescu "*the candidates have every interest in setting themselves apart from the parties. No party has a clean image and each has several members behind bars.*"

**Reminder of the Presidential election results of 22nd November and 6th December 2009 in Romania**

Turnout : 54,37% (1st round) and 58.02% (2nd round)

Candidates	No of votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)	No of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
<b>Traian Basescu (Democratic Liberal Party, PD-L)</b>	3 153 640	32,44	5 275 808	50,33
<b>Mircea Geoana (Social Democratic Party-Conservative Party, PSD-PC)</b>	3 027 838	31,15	5 205 760	49,66
<b>Crin Antonescu (National Party, PNL)</b>	1 945 831	20,02		
<b>Corneliu Vadim Tudor (Grand Romania Party, PRM)</b>	540 380	5,56		
<b>Hunor Kelemen (Democratic Union of Hungarians of Romania, UDMR)</b>	372 761	3,83		
<b>Sorin Oprescu (Independent)</b>	309 764	3,18		
<b>George Becali (New Generation Party, PNG)</b>	186 390	1,91		
<b>Remus Cernea (Green Party, PV)</b>	60 539	0,62		
<b>Constantin Rotaru (Socialist Alliance Party, PAS)</b>	43 684	0,45		
<b>Gheorghe-Eduard Manole (Independent)</b>	34 189	0,35		
<b>Ovidiu-Cristian Iane (Ecologist Party, PER)</b>	22 515	0,23		
<b>Constantin-Ninel Potirca (Independent)</b>	21 306	0,21		

Source : <http://www.bec2009p.ro/rezultate.html>

# Surprise in Romania where Klaus Johannis wins the presidential election

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## 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.

Corinne Deloy

Results

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

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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.

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**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)
<b>Klaus Johannis (National Liberal Party, PNL)</b>	2 881 406	30,37	54
<b>Victor Ponta (Social Democratic Party PSD)</b>	3 836 093	40,44	46

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

"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 Ceaucescu "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.

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