

Romania: An Ambivalent Parliamentary Opposition

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Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have analysed the workings of the Romanian Parliament focusing on individual legislative behaviour topics ranging from voting cohesion (Coman 2012; Gherghina and Chiru 2014) to party switching (Klein 2016), co-sponsorship patterns (Neamtu 2011; Chiru and Neamtu 2012) and constituency service (Chiru 2015). Another substantive body of scholarship concentrated on the MPs' attitudes, more specifically on their views on party discipline (Stefan et al 2012), representation roles (Chiru and Enyedi 2015), or their willingness to stand for re-election (Chiru et al 2013). In contrast, little work has been done on opposition behaviour in Romania. The scarce scholarship looked mostly at no confidence motions and investiture votes (Stan and Vancea 2014; Stan 2015; Chiva 2015).

This chapter makes a step in this direction and seeks to explore the voting behaviour, legislative initiative and scrutiny activity of the opposition in Romania between 2007 and 2011. This time frame allows us to understand the behaviour of Romanian opposition before (2007-2009), during (2009-2010) and after the crisis (2010-2011) with a relative symmetry in terms of

legislative periods. The Romanian Parliament is bicameral and consists of the Senate (upper Chamber, approximately 170 Senators) and the Chamber of Deputies (lower Chamber with varying membership, an average of 330 Deputies). The members of both Chambers were elected in the same way: closed-list proportional representation for the 2004 elections and mixed member proportional representation in 2008 and 2012 (Gherghina and Jigla 2012). Both chambers fulfil fairly similar tasks – with some small differences – and this chapter focuses on the lower Chamber for comparability with other countries in the book. In the investigated time-frame (2007-2011) the Romanian parliamentary arena is not very fragmented, especially when compared to the 1990s. A relatively small number of political parties (six to seven) won representation in the Chamber of Deputies out of which only five had a continuous presence in the legislature. This limited fragmentation is due to two reasons. First, the electoral coalitions – a quite common practice in post-communist Romania – led by parliamentary parties rarely included newly formed political actors¹ and thus channelled the support of voters towards existing competitors. Second, the cartelization of Romanian politics effectively closed the doors for new entries on the political arena (Gherghina and Chiru 2013; Gherghina 2014). One feature of this process was the flexibility in the government coalition formation: political parties across the political spectrum joined forces, ideological concerns being most of the time secondary. Virtually all possible combinations of governing coalitions were tried and most of the parties were in and out of government, with only a few always in government or in opposition. The ethnic Hungarian party was included in almost all coalition government, while the radical right Greater Romania Party (PRM) was always in opposition. In this sense, the permanent opposition party in Romania is radical, while all mainstream political parties were only temporary in opposition.

The Romanian party politics has been dominated in this period by the Social Democratic Party (PSD), a successor of the former communist party. Since 2004 it won all three legislative elections, was the *formateur* of two government coalitions and minor coalition partner once, and supported once a minority government. It relies on the support of approximately one third

¹One exception to this rule was the inclusion in 2012 of the National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR) in the grand coalition labelled the Social Liberal Union (USL). This party emerged to support the parliamentary majority supported by the country president in the previous term in office.

of the electorate on a regular basis. Its electoral performances are closely linked to those of the Conservative Party (PC) with which formed electoral alliances in 2004, 2008 and 2012. Although a minor political actor, with very limited electoral support when running on its own, the PC provided the PSD access to media outlets with national coverage owned by its leader. The Democratic Liberal Party (PDL) and the National Liberal Party (PNL) formed an electoral coalition in 2004 and were together in government until 2007. The PNL continued to lead a minority coalition government until 2008, while the PDL formed together with the PSD the grand coalition cabinet that followed the 2008 legislative elections. In 2009 the PSD left the coalition and PDL remained in charge of a minority coalition government until 2012, when it was toppled by successful no confidence vote and replaced with the cabinet of the Social Liberal Union, an alliance of PSD, PC and PNL. Later that year USL, now also including UNPR, won the legislative elections with a landslide majority, and continued governing.

The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) is the political party representing the ethnic Hungarians. It has a stable support around 5-6% of the electorate, which makes it a desired coalition partner for all mainstream parties as it can play a pivotal role. This is the reason for which it has been included in almost all coalition governments between 2006 and 2011; exception to this rule was the grand coalition formed after the 2008 election, the PDL-PSD, but the UDMR got into government in 2009 as the PSD left. The radical right PRM has been on a declining slope of support in 2004 and has been ousted of the legislature in 2008 without any successful attempt to gain seats since then. The UNPR competed only in 2012, after being formed in 2010 by members of Parliament (MPs) who formerly belonged to the PSD and the PNL and that is why the party has a heterogeneous ideology, as reflected in Table 1. It was included in the government coalition after the 2012 legislative elections next to the PSD, PNL and PC.

TABLE 1: POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT (2007-2011)²

Name abbrevia tion	National language name	English name	Party family	First entry into parliament	Party stability	Experience in government
PC	Partidul Conservator	Conservative Party	Conservative	2000	Stable party (always with PSD)	in and out of government
PDL	Partidul Democrat Liberal	Liberal Democratic Party	Conservative	1992	Fluctuating party (7 – 16.5%)	in and out of government
PNL	Partidul National Liberal	National Liberal Party	Liberal	1990	Fluctuating party (6.4 – 20%)	in and out of government
PRM	Partidul Romania Mare	Greater Romania Party	Extreme right	1992	Highly fluctuating party (3.9 – 19.5%)	never in government
PSD	Partidul Social Democrat	Social Democratic Party	Social democrat	1992	Fluctuating party (27.7 – 45.5%)	in and out of government
UDMR	Uniunea Democrata Maghiara din Romania	Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania	Ethno- nationalist party	1990	Stable party (5.1 – 7.5%)	always in government
UNPR	Uniunea Nationala pentru Progresul Romaniei	National Union for the Progress of Romania	Conservative Social democrat Special Interest Party	-	-	always in government

Table 2 includes the government and opposition composition between 2007 and 2011. The first government included in the analysis has Calin Popescu Tariceanu as Prime Minister, the leader of the PNL, and it is a minority government formed together with the UDMR. The coalition government had support from the PSD in opposition, many of the important bills passed during its term in office being possible only with the social-democrats' support. Following the 2008 legislative election, the two largest parties in terms of number of seats (PDL and PSD) formed a grand coalition joined by the PC as traditional ally of the PSD; the resulting coalition accounted

²Romania has reserved legislative seats for 18 different national minorities and thus one PPG is that of minorities. It is seldom in government.

for roughly 70% of the parliamentary seats. This situation lasted only for one year because in 2009, following disputes and conflicts between the coalition partners, the PC and the PSD left the government, being replaced by the UDMR. The following year, the newly created UNPR, an intra-parliamentary party including defectors from PNL and PSD, joined the coalition government and made the minimal majority slightly more comfortable when voting in parliament was involved.

TABLE 2: GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION COMPOSITION (2007-2011)

TERM	Prime Minister	Type of government	Government parties	Opposition parties
2007-2008	Calin Popescu Tariceanu III (PNL)	minority coalition	PNL + UDMR	PC, PDL, PSD, PRM
2008-2009	Emil Boc I (PDL)	grand coalition	PDL + PC + PSD	PNL, UDMR
2009 (67 days)	Emil Boc I (PDL)	caretaker	PDL + UDMR	PC, PNL, PSD
2009-2010	Emil Boc II (PDL)	minority coalition	PDL + UDMR	PC, PNL, PSD
2010-2011	Emil Boc III (PDL)	minority coalition	PDL + UDMR + UNPR	PC, PNL, PSD

The remainder of this book chapter is structured as follows. Next, we analyse the opposition's behaviour in the law making process. The third section is dedicated to opposition strategy beyond the voting behaviour with emphasis on the legislative initiatives, committee work and scrutiny. The fourth section deals with the specificities of the Romanian opposition behaviour, while the conclusions summarize the main findings.

The opposition's behaviour in the law-making process

This section reflects upon the opposition's voting behaviour and closely investigated the levels of consensus of opposition parties. Before delving into the substantial analysis, let us briefly refer to the case selection (governments and laws) and the operationalization of variables used to explain the opposition voting behaviour. The time frame in our analysis starts in April 2007 and ends in April 2011. This period allows us to investigate voting before and after the financial crisis. Thus, we analyse the 1001 laws which the Chamber of Deputies approved these four years, coinciding with four cabinets: Tariceanu III (the last before the 2008 elections: 5 April

2007 – 21 December 2008), Boc I between 22 December 2008 and 22 December 2009, Boc II between 23 December 2009 and 18 May 2010 and partially Boc III in office from 19 May 2010 until February 2012. The Boc I cabinet includes the Boc I caretaker government (in office between 15 October and 22 December 2009) for which we differentiated in the analysis. This caretaker cabinet exercised power after the Boc I cabinet lost a no confidence vote and the new PDL minority cabinet of Lucian Croitoru failed to obtain enough support at the November 2009 investiture vote. This extraordinary episode for Romania's politics - the first successful no confidence vote and the first and only failed investiture vote in the entire post-communist period, to be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

It must be said that the Romanian government and most of the politicians only partially and reluctantly acknowledged that Romania entered a financial crisis in 2009, with an eye on the presidential elections held later that year. It was only in 2010 that the magnitude of the crisis was fully revealed, right before the implementation of some of the harshest austerity measures in the EU. For the purpose of our analyses we consider 4 May 2009, the day when the government signed a loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) following negotiations held in April the same year, as the official acknowledgment of the crisis. Thus, we ran separate regression on the bills adopted from April 2007 to March 2009 and on those approved from April 2009 to April 2011 respectively.

As illustrated in the previous section the composition of the government (and implicitly that of opposition) differs within one term in office. The results in this chapter are based on the laws adopted during the following cabinets: Tariceanu III (PNL in coalition with the UDMR, supported through a silent agreement by the PSD), Boc I (a coalition government including the PDL and the PSD), Boc II (PDL, UDMR) and partially Boc III (PDL, UDMR, UNPR).

Variable operationalization

The dependent variable, *Group Dissent* is computed using the following formula:

$$Group\ Dissent = 100 - Consensus$$

where *Consensus* represents the percentage of PPG MPs who voted 'yes' for the bill out of the members of the PPG who were present at the vote.³

Legislative process duration measures the time passed (in years) from the initiation of the bill until the President promulgates it. This is a proxy for the complexity of the bill. *EU involvement* is a five-point scale ordinal variable measuring the potential for EU involvement given the policy sector the bill pertains to. This is based on Nugent's (2010) classification. *Economic crisis measures* indicates whether the bill included measures taken in response to the economic crisis. This was judged based on the reasons for the bill's necessity given by the initiator in the preamble of the bill (*expunere de motive*).

Ideological distance was computed as the difference between the average left-right score of the cabinet weighted by the number of seats held by each of the cabinet parties and the left-right score of the opposition party under consideration. The left-right scores of the parties were retrieved from the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow 2016), which draws on a number of well-known expert surveys.

Saliency refers to how salient a certain policy issue was considered for each of the parties. We use the data for Romanian parties available in the 2006 and 2010 Chapel Hill expert surveys, CHES (Hooghe 2010; Bakker et al 2015) while the matching between the policy dimensions of CHES and the policy issues follows, with some small exceptions, De Giorgi and Marangoni (2015).

We control for the type of government that was in place at the time of the vote with a series of dichotomous variables (minority coalition, minimum winning coalition and single party minority as a reference category) and for how large the group of government MPs was on the day of the vote. We also control for the size of each PPG present at the vote.

We also include in the models a number of dummy control variables related to the type of bill under consideration (organic bills and bills approving an emergency decree), its initiator (government, opposition MPs, government MPs, opposition and government MPs), and whether it was initiated in the previous legislature. The types of bills (ordinary, organic and

³Given that with one exception, all governments analyzed here were minority cabinets and therefore they had to rely on votes from the opposition to pass legislation, we also consider abstentions as dissent.

approving emergency decrees) might make a difference with respect to the level of opposition consent towards government. Organic laws are adopted in key areas and it is likely to stir more political debates and potential polarization. Laws approving emergency decrees are discussed less and they are often seen as rubber stamps. Appendix 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the dependent variable and the covariates.

Table 3 reflects the level of vote consensus at party level, which represents the percentage of PPG MPs who voted for the bill out of the members of the PPG who were present at the vote. The percentages illustrate that the strategies of the opposition parties vary significantly when it comes to voting. On the one hand, the deputies representing national minorities vote with the government virtually always. Similarly, during the period of the first cabinet analysed - the Tariceanu III minority coalition, two other opposition parties, PSD and PC were supporting the government, following a silent agreement, and this is reflected by the very low level of dissent. On the other hand, during the Boc II and III cabinets the main opposition parties, PSD and PNL registered very low levels of voting with the government compared with the rest of the period analysed. Thus, during the last cabinet analysed the level of consensus for the two parties is only around 60%, an unprecedented drop, even when the comparison is made with the behaviour of the PDL towards the Tariceanu III cabinet.

Not participating at the vote i.e. boycotting it become more and more of a strategy after 2010 as indicated by the lower number of votes to which the PNL MPs participated during the period of the Boc III cabinet. This strategy escalated to a full-blown parliamentary strike of the two main opposition parties, PSD and PNL, starting in January 2012.

TABLE 3. PERCENTAGE OF FAVOURABLE VOTES TO GOVERNMENT BILLS BY ALL PARTIES, PER GOVERNMENT (2007-2011)

Government	Tariceanu III	Boc 1	Boc 1 caretaker	Boc II	Boc III
PC	96				
PDL	71	99.1*	99*	99.4*	99.4*
PNL	98.6*	82.6	81.9	77.5	61.2
PSD	93.2	97.1*	93.3	88.5	59.3
UDMR	97.4*	88.1	90.5	91.4*	98.7*
Minorities	95.8	98.2	94.2	98.1	97.6
PRM	88.6				

* The party was in government

Explaining voting behaviour

Table 4 presents the results of the OLS regressions ran on the sample of opposition PPG - vote dyads. We run six regressions on three samples: on the pooled data, on the votes taken before the crisis and on the votes taken after the crisis was officially acknowledged. Every second model includes ideological distance and saliency, which reduces the samples of PPG-vote dyads, because no estimates of the ideology and saliency of issues were available for the ethnic minority PPG. Independent MPs were excluded from all samples. There were no measures related to the economic crisis and no minimum winning coalitions during the pre-crisis period analysed. To increase comparability, we do not include the two variables in the models ran on the post-crisis data either.

TABLE 4: DETERMINANTS OF VOTING DISSENT FOR OPPOSITION PARTIES (OLS MODELS)

	Model 1 (pooled)	Model 2 (pooled)	Model 3 (pre- crisis)	Model 4 (pre- crisis)	Model 5 (post- crisis)	Model 6 (post- crisis)
Legislative process duration	3.59*** (0.83)	4.69*** (1.06)	5.51*** (1.04)	6.68*** (1.19)	0.27 (1.41)	0.75 (2.23)
EU involvement	-0.68 (0.35)	-0.99* (0.45)	-0.69 ⁺ (0.41)	-1.03* (0.49)	-0.37 (0.66)	-0.52 (0.95)
Economic crisis measures	20.93*** (4.30)	27.87*** (5.22)				
Bill approves emergency decree	7.38*** (0.94)	9.30*** (1.19)	7.22*** (0.99)	8.26*** (1.21)	10.37*** (2.02)	15.41*** (2.88)
Organic bill	-1.98 ⁺ (1.19)	-1.86 (1.44)	-3.36** (1.27)	-3.67* (1.50)	-4.14 (4.42)	-6.10 (6.60)
Bill initiated in the past legislature	-9.50*** (1.92)	-13.66*** (2.74)	-12.52** (4.82)	-17.64** (6.75)	-6.93* (2.84)	-11.50** (4.26)
Bill sponsored by government MPs	3.65 ⁺ (1.95)	4.42 ⁺ (2.51)	5.23* (2.26)	5.65* (2.70)	3.57 (3.81)	5.53 (5.65)

Bill sponsored by opposition MPs	1.42 (1.48)	-0.14 (1.82)	4.75** (1.75)	2.85 (2.06)	- 10.15*** (2.33)	- 13.67*** (3.14)
Bill co-sponsored by gov.& opp. MPs	0.74 (1.33)	0.72 (1.68)	1.55 (1.38)	1.20 (1.69)	-0.90 (3.15)	-2.56 (4.32)
Minority coalition	9.35*** (2.36)	16.87*** (3.04)	-17.38** (6.38)	-10.12 (9.69)	8.31*** (1.98)	18.21*** (3.17)
Minimum winning coalition	2.30 (3.02)	-7.96 ⁺ (4.18)				
PPG size present at vote	0.16*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.02)	0.32*** (0.04)	-0.03 (0.09)
Size cabinet MPs	0.23*** (0.05)	0.49*** (0.07)	-0.33** (0.11)	-0.36* (0.18)	0.49*** (0.08)	0.65*** (0.13)
Ideological distance		3.07*** (0.39)		4.02*** (0.35)		-0.83 (1.20)
Saliency		2.21*** (0.60)		3.10*** (0.67)		1.40 (1.19)
Constant	-12.93*** (2.90)	-31.60*** (4.60)	27.80*** (8.48)	11.47 (13.03)	- 30.67*** (5.45)	- 34.75*** (10.11)
R ²	.081	.143	.060	.120	.092	.125
N	3926	2925	2626	2070	1300	855

Notes: Significance at ⁺ p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001
Robust standard errors in brackets

The findings in the pooled models corroborate most theoretical expectations. Thus, more complex bills, i.e. those which have a lengthier legislative process tend to attract on average 4% more dissent from the opposition parties. The same is true for bills dealing with the economic crisis: these bills produced 21 up to 28% more opposition, which represents one of the strongest effects in the model.

On the contrary, bills on policy domains where the EU has more leverage tend to be less opposed, but the effect is rather small. The type of bill seems to matter more than who the initiator is. Thus, opposition PPGs dissent less on organic bills and significantly more bills that approve legislation passed by the government through emergency decrees. The latter might actually be a stance regarding this type of law-making which circumvents Parliament and which

has increased in frequency over the years. The three sponsorship dummies (bill initiated by the government is the reference category) do not seem to matter to a great extent for the degree of opposition mounted by MPs outside of the parliamentary majority. We were expecting to see less dissent on bills initiated by opposition MPs, but this turns out to be the case only for the models ran on the post-crisis data. This might be due to the more frequent changes in government status of the parties before 2009: the parties that were in opposition at the time of the bill initiation might be part of the cabinet by the time of the final vote on the bill.

Ideological distance is an important predictor for how the various opposition PPGs vote. As expected, the larger the distance between the PPG and the average weighted ideological position of the cabinet, the larger the dissent. Furthermore, we find that issue salience matters for how opposition parties vote. Thus, on votes on policies that are relevant for the party, opposition MPs tend to oppose more the government bills.

Opposition MPs also tend to vote against more often when they face a minority coalition government, as opposed to when the cabinet is a minimum winning coalition. Here, the reference category is the Boc caretaker government, which was a single minority cabinet, but its very short time span and the temporal proximity to the PDL-PSD minimum winning Boc I cabinet warrants the former interpretation.

Bills initiated in the past legislature face less opposition, which is rather unsurprising given the alternation in power, i.e. the fact that many of them would have been initiated by cabinets of the parties that are now in opposition. The last two control variables also have a substantive effect. First, the more opposition MPs are present at the vote the larger the percentage of voting against the bill. Second, it seems that there is more opposition to bills proposed by the government when the number of government MPs present at the vote is larger. A possible explanation for the latter finding could be that the leadership of the parliamentary majority would refrain from having a vote on a bill that the opposition parties dislike when they risk losing it due to the absence of their own MPs.

Moving to the models ran separately on the pre and post- crisis samples, it must be said that there are a number of relevant differences. Thus, in the post-crisis period, opposition MPs tend to vote against bills favoured by the government irrespective of their complexity,

ideological distance to the cabinet or of how salient the policy domain is for their party. Moreover, they tend to oppose much more strongly than before bills which approve emergency decrees. The positive effects associated in the models 1 to 4 with organic bills and bills where the potential EU involvement is higher, fail to reach statistical significance in the post-crisis models; this may be another sign for the adversarial attitude displayed by the opposition against the government.

The opposition actors beyond the voting behaviour

This section explores the legislative initiatives, role of parliamentary committees and scrutiny. To begin with initiatives, most of the 1001 approved bills investigated in this chapter dealt with the European Union (EU) and other international issues (14%). Quite often, these laws were only ratified by the Parliament, following an international agreement initiated or signed by the executive. The prevalence of international issues is not surprising for the analysed time period since this was in the aftermath of Romania's accession to the EU. Much of the legislation approved by the Chamber of Deputies was initiated by government and had to do with the approval of various treaties and agreements signed by the country as a consequence of its new membership status. The density of these laws was quite high especially in the eve of the EU accession (i.e. Tariceanu III government) when the country legislature had to include into legislation the provisions of international agreements. The second most popular policy area was that of government operations - with topics ranging from the state bureaucracy to public property management (12.2%) and bills on banking, finance and domestic commerce (10.9%).

All these here policy areas reflect priorities of the government and are quite technical matters, very few were subject to debates in Parliament. Most of these laws were initiated by government. However, the following three policy areas in terms of density of laws reflect salient issues in society and were initiated to a great extent by parliamentarians. These policy areas are agriculture, security (law and crime) and defence, and social welfare. The former is an Achilles' heel for all post-communist government since it was a prominent sector of the Romanian economy during communism and the transition period witnessed a decay of agriculture – in spite of heavy subsidies granted by the Romanian state – due largely to the poor

management of public assets. Social welfare is another sensitive topic in society and any elections were won with pledges about this policy area; social welfare appears to be the topic that is highly contested by Romanian political parties irrespective of their position on the left-right ideological spectrum.

At the other extreme, the policy areas with the lowest number of bills passed refer to minority issues, cultural policy and immigration; together, the bills from these three areas account for less than 3.5% of the total number of bills passed between 2007 and 2011. A sensitive and important issue, especially in the pre-accession period when the EU emphasized the necessity to provide minorities a series of rights that were initially not envisaged by the Romanian state, the aspect of minorities remains on the agenda of the Romanian Parliament but with a lower number of bills adopted. Immigration has not represented a salient policy issue for the Romanian legislature in the past and its place as the lowest area in which bills are passed is not surprising.

The opposition parties initiated only a very small percentage of these laws – only 75 (7.5%). The vast majority of laws (771 or 77%) were initiated by the government while the rest were private member bills. Out of these the highest number 103 (10.3%) were co-sponsored by MPs of the opposition and government, while 52 (5.2%) had as sponsors only MPs of the governing parties.

Parliamentary committees

A significant realm of action for the opposition in the Romanian legislature is represented by parliamentary committees. Several observers noted the structural stability and gradual institutionalization of the parliamentary committee system in Romania (Chiva 2007: 205; Chiru 2010), but they are also endowed with extensive powers (Chiru and Gherghina 2016). Thus, committees in the Romanian Parliament are relatively strong in their capacity to acquire information. They can compel both ministers and civil servants to attend their sessions (art. 48-49). Each standing committee has its own staff and there has always been a high level of correspondence between their domains and the policy areas of ministers. The committees also have substantial rewriting ability. Bills are always considered by committees prior to the

plenary stage and the plenary votes on the text of the bill as amended by the committees, not separately on the initial bill and the committee amendments (art 105-107).

Since the 2003 constitutional revision the gravity centre of the legislative process moved from the plenary sessions to committees, particularly through the substantial reduction of plenary debates (Ionescu 2011: 211-2) Moreover, the committee report recommendations (to adopt or reject the bill) now structure much more the debates.⁴ The fact that committee chairs are allocated proportionally also helps the opposition parties have an important say in the committee stage of the legislative process. Unfortunately, data on MPs' activities in committees are not published in a standardized manner, thus we could not analyse them.

Scrutiny

In Romania, each MP has the right to submit oral and written questions as well as interpellations to any member of the cabinet or head of state agency, who are obliged to answer within two weeks (*Standing Orders of the Chamber of Deputies*). Questions are meant to be 'simple requests to respond whether a fact is true, whether an information is exact... or whether the government has the intention to take a decision in a given matter' (*Standing Orders*, art. 165). The scope of interpellations is significantly larger, as MPs can request through them 'explanations about the cabinet's policies in salient problems of its internal or external activities' (*Standing Orders*, art. 173). There are no restrictions on the number of interpellations an MP can submit, but MPs cannot ask more than two oral questions during a plenary meeting. Similar with the general upward trend in non-legislative activities of Western European MPs in the last decades (Green-Pedersen 2010), parliamentary questions and interpellations have become more and more popular with Romanian MPs with each legislative term. Thus, in the Chamber of Deputies their number has increased constantly from 2,238 in 1996-2000, to 4,023 in 2000-2004, then to 10,184 in 2004-2008, and finally to 13,812 in 2008-2012.

Table 5 below presents the number of parliamentary questions and interpellation submitted by the members of the PPGs in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies during the four governments analysed in this paper, for the entire period these cabinets were in office (April 5,

⁴Ionescu (2011) argues that since 2001 if the committee report recommends the rejection of the bill the debate is very short.

2007 to February 8, 2012). The time period for scrutiny covers a few supplementary months to the rest of analysis in the paper due to data availability.

TABLE 5. PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES OF ALL PARTIES, PER GOVERNMENT (2007 - 2012)⁵

	<i>Parliamentary questions</i>					<i>Interpellations</i>				
	Tariceanu III	Boc I	Boc I caretaker	Boc II	Boc III	Tariceanu III	Boc I	Boc I caretaker	Boc II	Boc III
PC	230 (12.1)					145 (7.6)				
PDL	770 (11.5)	634*	67*	395*	1032*	465 (6.9)	268*	43*	188*	383*
PNL	1048*	360 (5.5)	32 (0.5)	271 (4.9)	1447 (25.4)	48* (0.8)	239 (3.7)	30 (0.5)	126 (2.3)	321 (5.6)
PSD	480 (4.6)	291*	100 (0.9)	607 (6)	2534 (27.5)	564 (5.4)	261*	70 (0.6)	409 (4)	1279 (13.9)
UDMR	54* (2.5)	50 (2.3)	5 (0.2)	23* (1)	60* (3)	1* (0.1)	19 (0.9)	0 (0)	2* (0.1)	4* (0.2)
Minorities	11 (0.6)	39 (2.2)	0 (0)	26 (1.4)	52 (3.1)	43 (2.4)	20 (1.1)	3 (0.2)	13 (0.7)	24 (1.4)
PRM	49 (2.3)					220 (10.5)				
UNPR				28 (1.8)	22* (1.4)				56 (3.5)	40* (2.5)

* The party was in government

** Average number of questions/ interpellations per MP in parentheses.

⁵The size of the PPGs for each cabinet used to compute the mean values presented in Table 5 is the following: Tariceanu III: PSD - 105, PNL 60, PC 19, Minorities 18, PRM 21, UDMR 22, PDL 67; Boc I: PDL 115, PSD 114, PNL 65, UDMR 22, Minorities 18; Boc I caretaker - same as Boc I; Boc II: PDL 121 (115-127), PSD 102 (109-94) PNL 55, UDMR 22, Minorities 18, UNPR 16; Boc III: PDL 124 (127-121), PSD 92 (94-90), PNL 57 (54-59) UDMR 20, Minorities 17, UNPR 16 MPs. As it can be seen from the values in parentheses, the size of the largest PPGs varied greatly due to party switching.

As a general trend, MPs from the main opposition PPGs tend to ask on average more parliamentary questions than their colleagues from the parliamentary majority. The only exception to this trend is represented by the Tariceanu III cabinet, when MPs of the main governing party, PNL asked significantly more questions than the PSD and PDL MPs.

For Boc I, one can observe a remarkable increase in the number of question and interpellations, asked by the members of the opposition, and to a smaller extent also by the members of the parliamentary majority. The highest number of questions is registered during the Boc III cabinet and is mainly driven by the MPs of PSD and PNL. Nevertheless, we know from previous research (Chiru 2015) that this increase is not uniformly distributed within the PPGs but is mostly due to a few MPs who asked many hundreds questions. A third finding is that the MPs representing ethnic minorities, i.e. from the UDMR and the ethnic minority PPGs, tend to ask very few questions irrespective of their participation in the cabinet or of the period analysed.

Moving to interpellations, we observe that they are less frequently used than parliamentary questions, the only exceptions to this rule being represented by the behaviour of two fringe parties, PRM and UNPR. Throughout the entire period analysed, the main opposition PPGs asked more interpellations than the main government parties. In this context, it is worth noting the extremely large difference between the number of parliamentary questions asked by PNL MPs and their share of interpellations during the Tariceanu 3 cabinet. Last but not least, the UDMR MPs and the representatives of the other ethnic minorities are equally shy in asking interpellations as they were with respect to parliamentary questions.

Due to data availability problems, we were not able to disentangle the number of bill initiatives submitted by party during each cabinet analysed here. However, when looking at the government versus opposition divide during the entire 2004-2008 and 2008-2012 terms, two clear patterns are detectable.⁶ First, there was an increase in the average number of Private Member Bills initiated: from 20.5 bills per government MP in the first term to 37 in the second,

⁶These results are based on the affiliation of the MPs at the beginning of the legislative cycle, while for 2008-2012 term, PSD and PNL are not counted as parliamentary party, although they were a part of the governing coalitions for some months at the beginning and the end of the term.

and from 29.2 to 31.7 per opposition MP. Second, government MPs were generally more likely to see their bills adopted than their colleagues in opposition: averages of 5 vs. 3.6 in the first term and 5.5 vs. 3.8 in the second term.

Country specificities

One of the most important factors that marked the evolution of the opposition behaviour in the analysed period was the relation between the country's President Traian Basescu and the parliamentary parties. The period analysed in this chapter covers two years from each term in office and his actions had a visible result as we will explain in the following lines. His adversarial style of politics and the actions he took to forge favourable parliamentary majorities contributed to the polarization of the political scene and the radicalization of opposition strategies. During both his terms in office (2004-2009 and 2009-2014) he has openly favoured his former party – Basescu was the PDL president until he became country president – and he was impeached twice by parliament for such a behaviour.⁷ One example of favouritism was in 2007 when he took a clear stance in the fight ignited between the PDL and the PNL within the coalition government, which resulted in the breakup of the electoral coalition and the emergence of the Tariceanu III government. Another example is the way in which Basescu insisted on maintaining the PDL as a *formateur* after the departure of the PSD from government in 2009 although an alternative majority had formed in the Parliament. We discuss this example in more detail below.

During this period opposition parties saw more and more their MPs 'recruited' by the governing parties, a strategy which culminated with the foundation of a new, intra-parliamentary party, the UNPR - formed by members of the two main opposition parties at the time, PSD and PNL, in order to maintain a parliamentary majority favourable to the President and its party. In turn, opposition parties adopted more confrontational strategies ranging from fielding no confidence motions to parliamentary strikes.

This increasing adversarial behaviour resulted in the first two successful no confidence votes in post-communist Romania (Stan 2015). In 2009 the PDL-led government lost a vote of

⁷According to the Romanian constitution the president is a neutral political actor. In that sense, he is not allowed to be member of a political party and should not favor any party during his term in office.

no confidence as soon as the PSD left the coalition government. The two parties had a similar share of votes in the 2008 election and formed a grand coalition that summed up to more than 70% of the seats in Parliament. The departure of PSD put the government in the position to rely on a parliamentary minority and thus the vote of no confidence initiated by the opposition succeeded. The central argument in favour of the censure motion was the poor management of the economic hardships of the country, severely struck by the financial crisis. Nevertheless, this vote was also oriented against the country president, a fierce supporter of the PDL government, who ran for re-election in slightly more than a month after this vote. The opposition parties considered that the failure of his preferred party to remain in government will affect his chances of getting re-elected. Basescu ignored the alternative majority formed in the Parliament by PSD, PNL and UDMR and nominated Lucian Croitoru, a high level official of the Romania's National Bank to lead a PDL minority cabinet. This cabinet failed at the investiture vote on November 4, 2009 and the President refrained from nominating another PM for the remaining days of his term. After Basescu won a new presidential mandate, he was able to appoint another PDL-led cabinet including UDMR and having the support of the newly created UNPR, an intra-parliamentary founded by defectors from PNL and PSD.

In 2012, a second vote of no confidence occurred and was successful as the result of new tensions between a large opposition and the decision of the country president not to appoint a prime minister from the ranks of that opposition. In February 2012, Boc resigned after several weeks of protests oriented against the austerity measures introduced by his government. In Parliament, three opposition parties (PSD and PNL, together with PC) formed the electoral alliance USL and enjoyed also the support of other MPs. They formed a parliamentary majority and expected to have one of its leaders nominated as prime minister after Boc's resignation. Nevertheless, Basescu appointed Mihai Razvan Ungureanu, the former head of the Romanian Foreign Intelligence Service (SIE) and a politician with close ties to the PDL, as prime minister. In less than three months the opposition was able to pass a new vote of no confidence.

Conclusion

The analysis in this paper showed that the opposition in Romania can be perceived in an ambivalent manner. On the one hand, its activity is quite limited when it comes to legislative initiatives that become laws: only 7.5% of the total number of approved laws between 2007 and 2011 were initiated by MPs belonging to opposition parties. Other 10% of the approved laws had among their initiators MPs from opposition parties. On the other hand, the level of opposition mounted by parties outside of the cabinet is relatively small when it comes to voting on legislative proposals favored by the parliamentary majority. Since more than three quarters of these proposals come from the executive, this indicates that many of the opposition MPs (with small differences between the PPGs) vote in favour of bills coming from government. A close look at the distribution of the approved bills indicates that this behaviour is somewhat expected since the top three issues – accounting for more than one third of the total – are international affairs, government operations, and banking, finance and domestic commerce. Many of them had a technical nature and there were very few amendments made in the plenary sessions. Nevertheless, we could also observe an increase in the levels of dissent, or less consensus in the period after the outburst of the financial crisis.

Moreover, after the 2008 legislative elections and particularly given the active involvement of the country's president in parliamentary politics, the opposition displayed a more adversarial attitude towards the government. While throughout the entire analysed period the level of scrutiny was quite intense, in 2009 and 2012 two votes of no confidence led to prime ministers' dismissals. The findings of the multivariate analyses support the idea of an active opposition: MPs belonging to opposition parties vote more against bills that approve legislation passed by the government through emergency decrees.

One important characteristic of the Romanian opposition is its dynamic composition. Due to the flexible nature of coalition governments, the parties in opposition change on a regular basis; so far, only one party has been constantly in opposition, the others moving between their government and opposition status. This makes it difficult for the opposition to have a homogenous behaviour over time and quite often their actions depend on the cabinet.

The main conclusion of our chapter is that overall, both the voting behaviour and the scrutiny activity of opposition parties in Romania follow predictable patterns driven both by

strategic - vote winning concerns and by ideological differences and policy preferences despite the fact that the profiles of the parties are in general quite fuzzy.

APPENDIX 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF DEPENDENT VARIABLE AND COVARIATES

	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	N
DV: Group dissent	12.20	27.49	0	100	3067
Legislative process duration	0.41	0.62	0	5	3067
EU involvement	1.67	1.26	0	4	3067
Economic crisis measures	0.03	0.16	0	1	3067
Bill approves emergency decree	0.49	0.50	0	1	3067
Organic bill	0.12	0.32	0	1	3067
Bill initiated in the past legislature	0.08	0.28	0	1	3067
Bill sponsored by government MPs	0.05	0.22	0	1	3067
Bill sponsored by opposition MPs	0.08	0.28	0	1	3067
Bill co-sponsored by gov.& opp. MPs	0.11	0.31	0	1	3067
Minority coalition	0.81	0.39	0	1	3067
Minimum winning coalition	0.16	0.36	0	5	3067
Size PPG present at vote	30.14	22.88	0	95	3067
Size cabinet MPs	37.43	18.97	18.5	90.36	3067
Ideological distance	-0.84	1.71	-2.81	1.72	2925
Saliency	5.19	1.04	2	7.81	2925

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