

Romania: Post-Communist Intra-Party Conflicts and Resolutions

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Abstract: Over the past thirty-five years, Romanian political parties were alive and abuzz. Also their history for that period was marked by internal ideological heterogeneity, intra-group disagreements, and quite often by open conflicts. Although hard to learn, intra-party conflict management was a necessity for each party organization as, despite contentious internal affairs, each party elite needed to maintain coherence of the overall organisation's coherence, stabilise membership and be able to campaign coherently in elections. This article examines the two major Romanian political parties that have been in continuous operation since 1990: The Social Democratic Party (PSD – Partidul Social Democrat) and The National Liberal Party (PNL – Partidul Național Liberal). It analyses intra-party conflicts in terms of ideological disputes and competition for power within groups. The conclusions are that despite the turmoil in Bucharest party headquarters, there was a surprising degree of organization stability at the level of each party throughout the period, far greater than ordinarily recognized in the literature or in the op-eds of political pundits.

Keywords: Party Elite Conflict, Intra-Group Disagreements, Ideological Differences, Strategic Conflict.

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Introduction

The collapse in 1989 of the Romanian one-party communist regime zeroed in on the rebirth of multi-party politics. The new party-diverse political reality was marked by the onset of a complex and turbulent transition towards democracy, market economy, institutional restructuring, and intense public debates regarding Romania's political future. Some of the new entities that filled the vacuum left by the fall of the Romanian Communist Party had deep historical roots and were to some extent frozen in time, while others were novel constructions designed to navigate the evolving political environment (Marian, 2013). People with limited or no recent nor relevant multi-party electoral experience engaged in a herculean task aimed to craft afresh society-large organizations able to advance national programs, public policy proposals, and an international agenda for the country.

Relevant to the macro history of politics in Romanian in the decades that followed is not who was in the sparring in each election or government crisis but who were the medalists. The two most significant political parties to emerge and establish dominance in the post-communist period were the Social Democratic Party (PSD – Partidul Social Democrat) and the National Liberal Party (PNL – Partidul Național Liberal). Despite stiff elite-level conflict, leadership heterogeneity, and quite often open conflict, both parties played a central role in shaping Romania's political trajectory from 1990 onwards.

This paper aims to map the conflicts of the elites of these two parties, exploring how internal divisions, ideological struggles, and power disputes shaped their evolution over the past three and a half decades. We will focus on: i) the origins and backgrounds of internal conflicts, including the historical contexts in which they emerged and the personalities involved, ii) the nature of these conflicts, distinguishing between purely ideological clashes, strategic disagreements, and power struggles that shaped party dynamics, iii) the key events that triggered or escalated these disputes, including electoral contests, leadership challenges, and policy debates, iv) the resolutions, if any, that brought these conflicts to a close, including expulsions, formal splits, or reconciliations, v) the long-term consequences for party structure, voter base, and the broader Romanian political system, highlighting how these episodes impacted party stability and electoral performance.

In this context, the PSD and PNL stand as critical case studies for understanding the fragility of party unity in emerging democracies and the broader challenges of consolidating political organizations in the face of rapid social and economic transformation. These conflicts are not merely historical footnotes but are integral to explaining the contemporary dynamics of Romanian politics. As such, they provide valuable insights into the persistent challenges of party cohesion, ideological alignment, and elite competition in post-communist Europe.

Political Context: New Highly Personalized Party Elites

The new party elites came on stage by the bushel and a flurry of political parties were quick to be created. The process was contaminated by a strong feature of the former communist regime: the 'individual leader is the source of the authority' (Huntington 1992, 581). This

feature was visible at the level of the leadership of most of the new parties which coalesced around highly visible figures in the Romanian society among which the most relevant were: Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman, leaders of the National Salvation Front (FSN – Frontul Salvării Naționale; the party that emerged from the political structure that overthrew the communist regime), Corneliu Coposu, co-founder and leader of the National Peasant's Christian Democrat Party (PNȚCD – Partidul Național Țărănist Creștin Democrat), Radu Câmpeanu founder and leader of the National Liberal Party (PNL – Partidul Național Liberal), Sergiu Cunescu founder of the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR – Partidul Democrației Sociale în România), Domokos Géza, founder and leader of Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR – Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România), and Victor Surdu of the Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania (PDAR – Partidul Democrat Agrar din România). All these founding figures of the new parties were either former low-ranking members of the communist regime political elite or came from families with a history in pre-communist politics. In the early 1990s a form of dynastic multi-party arrangement replaced what Vladimir Tismăneanu (1985) identified as the 'dynastic socialism' of the former Romanian Communist Party.

In the first years of multi-party political life, this tendency of high personalization of the party leadership exploded into internal conflicts and splits. The large and political eclectic National Salvation Front (FSN) was split among an Ion Iliescu extension which following a tortuously long path ended up becoming the Social-Democratic Party (PSD) and a Petre Roman grouping that resulted in a liberal oriented party which eventually merged more than twenty years later with National Liberal Party (PNL). In a parallel development, the old social-democrats of the pre-communist regime times mobilized around a Sergiu Cunescu, a political figure active in the old ranks of the party in late 1940s, and formed Social Democratic Party 'Constantin Titel Petrescu' (PSD-CTP – Partidul Social Democrat Constantin Titel Petrescu), after the name of the last leader of the party imprisoned by the communist regime in early 1950s.

The roots of the PSD can be traced back to the National Salvation Front (FSN), the political organisation that seized power amid the December 1989 anti-communist revolution. The FSN was initially intended to be a temporary governing body and was presented as such. It was not expected to participate in the first free elections, held in 1990. However, under the leadership of Ion Iliescu (who was part of the Communist Party nomenclature), the FSN quickly transformed into a political party seeking to establish itself as a major force in Romanian politics. This was especially the case after it won the first post-communist multi-party elections in May 1990 by a huge majority. In 1992, former prime minister Petre Roman won the internal party elections and became president of the FSN. Following this result, Ion Iliescu and his supporters split from the party to form the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN – Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale), which absorbed three other parties in 1993 and rebranded as the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR – Partidul Democrației Sociale din România). In 2001, under Adrian Năstase's leadership, the PDSR merged with the smaller left-wing PSDR (Partidul Social Democrat Român) to

form today's PSD (Partidul Social Democrat). This political move further consolidated the PSD's position as the dominant force on the left and in the Romanian political party system.

During its roughly 35 years of political activity, and especially after the 1990s, the PSD was influenced by strong leaders who established themselves at both the party and national levels. Key figures such as Adrian Năstase and Liviu Dragnea combined left-wing economic views with conservative values, whereas leaders such as Mircea Geoană and Marcel Ciolacu attempted to moderate the party's ideology and reduce Eurosceptic and conservative views.

The National Liberal Party (PNL) has a historical background dating back to 1875, it is the oldest party in the history of the modern Romanian state. Re-established in January 1990, by Radu Câmpeanu and other liberal figures that survived the communist regime, the party positioned itself as a pro-market, right-leaning alternative to the remnants of the communist political elite. Initially, the party attracted a diverse group of intellectuals, former political dissidents, and, by that time, grey-haired members of the pre-communist liberal tradition. Early in its existence, the party experienced internal factionalism with multiple splinter groups emerging due to disagreements over ideology coherence, leadership style, and organizational strategy. Radu Câmpeanu conflicted with the liberal elite gathered in his party and split to form in 1993 a new structure called 'Câmpeanu' National Liberal Party (PNL-C – Partidul Național Liberal 'Câmpeanu'), while in a parallel development other liberals coalesced around a scion of the old pre-communism liberal dynasty, the Brătianu, and founded the eponymous 'Brătianu' Liberal Union (UL-B – Uniunea Liberală 'Brătianu').

Other prominent figures in the early years of PNL included Mircea Ionescu-Quintus, who later became an influential leader of the party, and Dinu Patriciu, who played a significant role in shaping the party's economic policies. The internal struggles led to the early creation of breakaway factions, yet by the late 2000s, PNL had consolidated its position as the main center-right party in Romania featuring a mainly classical liberal ideology on economics, combined with rather conservative social values. The post-communist political period saw PNL both trying to counterbalance the influence of PSD in Romanian politics either by participating in right-wing, anti-PSD coalitions or by governing together with PSD and thus forming strong governing majorities.

Intra-Party Conflicts in New Democracies

Conflicts within political parties have multiple dimensions and are triggered by factors such as ideological incongruence, disloyalty and tensions between elected officials, members or various party associated interest groups (Gherghina, Close, and Kopecký, 2019). The concept of intra-party conflict itself is analyzed with a variety of theoretical approaches. Recent literature developments to the topic tend to concentrate on two main approaches for discussing conflict, the structural approach and the behavioral approach (Bolleyer and Kölln, 2024). Through the structural lenses the party is a social system in which conflict

arises when individuals or groups with various roles, hierarchical positions, and strategic goals seek to renegotiate their positions. Through the behavioral lenses the party is merely an instrument for attaining external or societal goals and conflict arises when individuals or groups seek to influence the ideology and policies of the party. Resolutions of party conflicts also vary, from internal negotiations, leadership change, to more radical consequences, such as the split of the party, or in the extreme cases party disbandment. Party splits and party disbandment have serious implications at society level, like government stability (Ceron, 2015). Organizational instability and party splits raised more serious problems in young democracies (Mainwaring, 2016). However, Ibenskas and Sikk (2016) analyzed eleven Central and Eastern European countries and showed that party splits, as a form of intra-party conflicts, were not strongly correlated with inter-party and intra-coalition conflicts.

The high degree of variability in modern democratic arrangements ushers in each party system having its own pattern of peculiarity. Romania is a fourth-wave democracy with a party system similar to the other Central and East European young democracies (McFaul, 2002). Given the distinctive features of the CEE space (Pop-Eleches, 2015), potentially high levels of party instability and intra-party conflicts are to be expected. In this context we should expect that Romania is not the odd case out and thus fits into a pattern of party level conflicts and instability. Additionally, in Romania's case, party splits may even be generated by larger features of the political system. Although not clearly stated in the Constitution, Romania is a hybrid political system (a semi-presidential republic) and, alongside other similar systems, has to deal with high political instability, generated especially by intra-executive conflicts involving the president and the prime-minister (Sedelius and Mashalter, 2013). Due to the inherent design of semi-presidentialism, it is reasonable to examine it as an external influence factor of intra-party conflicts and party-level splits; for example, during a cohabitation period, the president could stir things up in the prime-minister's party (or other coalition parties), ultimately leading to a split and thus weakening the governing coalition and the prime-minister's support (Marian and King, 2011).

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework we propose starts from the assumption that an internal party conflict is a development in the normal life of the party in which at least two different groups perceive their agendas as negatively impacting each other. Core to such agendas are votes, public offices, public policy (Kolltveit, 2023) but also, in some cases, ideological clarifications (Isotalo, Mattila, and von Schoultz, 2020). In our model, the conflict development (1) takes place in a specific party background, (2) has a specific nature, (3) is affected by key events and dynamics, (4) has a resolution, and (5) it ends with a number of consequences for the party life. This analytical framework is intended as a heuristic framework to identify and map internal party conflicts. We project this framework on all internal conflicts we were able to identify for the timeframe in-between 1990 and 2025 for both Romania's liberal and social-democratic parties. For each of the two parties we

propose a narrative that ensures consistency for the reader to follow each string of party internal conflicts. However, both those party cases illustrate the magnitude of the systemic shocks the Romanian political life experienced in the transition to democracy process.

Social Democratic Party Conflict Episodes

The story of the social-democrats in Romania is a piece of magical realism. It is a story of a reformed national communism with a sense of social fantasy. It is a ghost story – the ghost of communism – that is not about the ghost itself, but about power struggles, with the ghost being just a small part of the party's everyday life.

Episode-1.

Two Ghost: Post-Communism versus Democracy

(Background of the conflict) Following the 1989 Revolution, the National Salvation Front (FSN) led by Romania's president Ion Iliescu and prime-minister Petre Roman, emerged as the national dominant political force. Initially, FSN functioned as a provisional government encompassing many political leaders across the aisle, but by the spring of 1990 it was transformed into a political party that comprised mainly second- and third-layer former communist cadres aligned with Ion Iliescu. By 1992, the alliance between Iliescu, representing the more traditional and state-centric left, and acting prime minister Petre Roman, who embraced economic liberalism and modernization, began to fracture. This reflected growing ideological and generational divisions within the party, now strained by the pressures of institutionalization and democratic consolidation.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was a power struggle with a strong ideological component. Iliescu advocated for a controlled transition and state-guided limited reforms, whereas Roman pushed for more aggressive liberalization and market reforms. Their rivalry was also personal, rooted in competing leadership styles and visions for the post-communist left. The tension was internal, though amplified by growing societal demands for reform and political pluralism.

(Key events and dynamics) In early 1992, the leadership conflict came to a head. At a decisive FSN Congress, Petre Roman was elected president of FSN, triggering a break with Iliescu and his supporters. In response, Iliescu and his faction formed the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN – Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale), effectively splitting the party. The new formation gathered the majority of FSN's parliamentary group and the party's traditionalist base.

(Resolutions) The episode concluded with an organizational split that reshaped the structure of the Romanian social-democracy. Iliescu's FDSN established itself as a separate entity and rapidly became dominant on the left of Romanian politics. Roman retained a diminished FSN, which eventually slowly evolved into a moderate-liberal oriented political formation.

(*Consequences*) The formation of FDSN allowed Iliescu to consolidate a loyal and ideologically coherent party base, which later became the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR), which was finally labelled the PSD. It marked the emergence of a stable left-wing political force. Roman's political influence declined in the aftermath.

Analytical observations: This conflict reveals the fragility of post-revolutionary coalitions and the difficulty of maintaining unity in ideologically broad formations. It underscores how elite fragmentation and power struggles can lead to foundational realignments. The episode also demonstrates the importance of institutional control—Iliescu's faction succeeded in consolidating power through control of party structures and aligning with broader societal preferences for stability over rapid liberalization.

Episode-2.

Social-liberals versus the Ghost of National Communism

(*Background of the conflict*) In the aftermath of the 1996 parliamentary and presidential elections, FDSN now transformed into the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR – Partidul Democrației Sociale în România), under the control of Ion Iliescu, entered the opposition after losing power to a center-right coalition formed around the National Peasant's Christian Democrat Party. During this period, internal divisions deepened over how the party should position itself ideologically and strategically. Ion Iliescu, the founding figure and central authority within the party, maintained a more conservative and state-controlled approach to national politics. In contrast, Teodor Meleşcanu, a prominent party member and former foreign minister, advocated for a more modern, reform-oriented, and pro-European agenda. The defeat in the elections intensified debates over leadership and the future of the party.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was primarily ideological, centered on the party's identity and direction. Meleşcanu sought to steer the party toward what was thought of as social-liberal Western-oriented model, while Iliescu and his allies aimed to preserve a more traditional social-democratic line rooted in national sovereignty while advocating for cautious societal and economic reform. The rift was also shaped by a generational divide and differing international alignments. The conflict had an internal origin but was influenced by external pressures for modernization and European integration.

(*Key events and dynamics*) By 1997, tensions within the party had become unmanageable. After facing resistance from the Iliescu-led leadership and being denied the opportunity to implement reforms, Meleşcanu left the PDSR to establish the Alliance for Romania (ApR – Alianța pentru România), a new centrist party that supported EU membership. Although this attracted several younger members, the ApR ultimately failed to challenge the PDSR's dominance on the left.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict ended with a clear split. Meleşcanu's departure marked for the 1997-2000 legislature the marginalization of the reformist faction within PDSR.

No institutional reconciliation took place. PDSR retained its structure and ideological orientation under Iliescu's guidance.

(Consequences) In the short term, the split fragmented the left and diluted opposition to the governing center-right coalition. ApR struggled electorally and failed to establish itself as a major political force. In the long term, Meleşcanu's trajectory continued in other political formations, while PDSR maintained its dominant position on the left. The conflict reaffirmed Iliescu's authority but also exposed the party's limited tolerance for internal reform.

Analytical observations: This episode highlights the costs of ideological rigidity and leadership centralization. Although Ion Iliescu succeeded in retaining control, the inability to accommodate internal diversity stifled innovation within the party. The conflict also illustrates a recurring pattern in Romanian politics: ambitious reformers, when excluded, tend to create splinter parties rather than effect change from within leading to fragmentation without significant long-term transformation.

Episode-3.

European Social Democracy versus the Ghost of National Communism

(Background of the conflict) In 2000 PDSR was back in power in the parliament with Iliescu president of Romania, again. In 2001 the party rebranded into The Social Democratic Party (PSD). Four years later, in 2004, elections marked a turning point for PSD, which lost both the presidential and legislative races. Ion Iliescu, the symbolic leader of the party and former president of Romania, remained a central figure, while Mircea Geoană emerged as a new-generation public figure with Western diplomatic experience and reformist credentials. In 2005, amid growing calls for party renewal, PSD held a congress where Geoană challenged Iliescu for the party presidency. This event triggered one of the most significant internal leadership confrontations in Romanian social-democracy post-communist history.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was a power struggle with a significant generational and ideological component. Iliescu embodied the old guard *zoa politica* defined by centralized control, nationalism, and continuity with the party's early post-communist identity. Geoană represented a modern, reformist vision aligned with European social democracy. The contest was internal but influenced by broader social and political pressure for modernization and European integration.

(Key events and dynamics) At an extraordinary party congress in 2005, Mircea Geoană won the presidency of PSD by defeating Iliescu in a closely watched internal vote. The result surprised many and reflected a shift in the party elite toward generational change. Iliescu, dissatisfied with the outcome, publicly criticized the new leadership, calling some members a "group of clowns."

(Resolutions) The conflict ended with Geoană achieving an institutional victory and Iliescu being marginalised, though not completely excluded. Although Iliescu continued to hold

honorary positions, real power shifted to the new leadership, and his influence in the party gradually diminished. Rather than reconciliation, the resolution involved the coexistence of rival factions within a reconfigured balance of power.

(Consequences) In the short term, the leadership change marked a symbolic break with the party's founding figure and simultaneously with the party's past. It also created internal instability, with repeated disputes between the reformist and conservative wings. Over time, Geoană's leadership proved fragile, and his inability to consolidate authority eventually led to further fragmentation. The episode opened a period of volatility within PSD that would continue throughout the following two decades.

Analytical observations: This episode underscores the challenges of generational transition in the case of a dominant party with strong founding figures. Geoană's rise represented an opportunity for modernization, yet lack of broad accord over policy and ideological developments and to some extent continued influence of the old guard weakened his capacity to reform the party. The conflict illustrates how leadership transitions, even when procedurally legitimate, can produce long-term instability if not accompanied by structural renewal and internal legitimacy.

Episode-4.

The Ghost is Still There: Old Guard Last Stand

(Background of the conflict) By 2007, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) was struggling with internal coherence and public credibility. The leadership of Mircea Geoană had failed to consolidate the party and to mount an effective opposition during the legislature that started in 2004, while the influence of veteran figures such as Ion Iliescu continued to have appeal for an old generation of leaders that was aiming for a comeback. Against this backdrop, a growing group of younger, reformist leaders began demanding generational renewal and a departure from the party's historical legacy. Ioan Rus, a respected social democrat and member of the reformist wing, became one of the most vocal critics of Iliescu's continued dominance within the party's decision-making structures.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was neither programmatic nor organizational in nature, it rather reflected interpersonal tension, generational clash, and divergent views on the party's internal democracy. While not centered on ideology or direct power competition, it focused on the role of founding figures like Iliescu in blocking internal reform and party modernization.

(Key events and dynamics) The disagreement between Ioan Rus and Ion Iliescu became public in 2007, when Rus criticized the persistence of 'honorary leadership' without accountability. Iliescu, in turn, defended his symbolic role and criticized the reformist wing for lacking consistency and for being overly deferential to external pressures, especially coming from the acting president, Traian Băsescu. Though there was no direct expulsion

of either of the two leaders involved, the conflict played out in party forums and the media, polarizing members and weakening internal cohesion.

(Resolutions) The episode did not culminate in a formal organizational rupture. However, the resolution was informal: Rus gradually distanced himself from the leadership core, while Iliescu maintained his honorary role without operational authority. The party continued under a fragile status quo, avoiding an open split but failing to resolve its structural tensions.

(Consequences) This episode deepened the PSD's internal fragmentation and highlighted the tension between legacy leadership and renewal. It also weakened the party's ability to present a modernized image to the electorate, contributing to further instability in the following years. The reluctance to clarify Iliescu's role left lingering ambiguity about the party's direction and legitimacy.

Analytical observations: This conflict highlights the consequences of unresolved value shifts within post-communist political parties. The cohabitation of honorary leaders and reformist actors without clear boundaries of formal party authority can lead to institutional paralysis. Furthermore, it demonstrates that internal reform initiatives often fail not due to ideological incompatibility, but due to the entrenched informal authority and symbolic power concentrated in founding elites.

Episode-5.

Individual Agency versus Centralized Party Control

(Background of the conflict) In the lead-up to the 2008 local elections, tensions within the Social Democratic Party (PSD) resurfaced, particularly around candidate selection processes. Sorin Oprescu, a prominent and charismatic member of the party, expressed his intention to run for mayor of Bucharest. However, the party leadership, under Mircea Geoană, opted for a different candidate, prioritizing centralized strategy and internal loyalty over popularity. This decision sparked a serious confrontation between Oprescu and the party's leadership.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was of an organizational and procedural nature, rather than ideological. It stemmed from disagreements over internal democracy, candidate selection, and the role of individual agency versus centralized party control. Oprescu felt marginalized and contested what he perceived as undemocratic practices within PSD. While not framed as a doctrinal dispute, the conflict exposed deeper tensions regarding how authority and legitimacy were exercised in the party.

(Key events and dynamics) After being denied the party's nomination for the Bucharest mayoral race, Oprescu decided to run as an independent candidate. This move defied PSD leadership and created media and public pressure on the party. Despite lacking formal party support, Oprescu's personal popularity and strong campaign led to his election as mayor

of Bucharest in 2008. This victory was interpreted as a rebuke to the PSD leadership and a signal of the party's disconnection from public sentiment.

(Resolutions) The conflict ended with Oprescu's estrangement from PSD after his election as an independent. While no formal expulsion occurred, his confrontational stance marked a clear break from the party ranks. PSD leadership neither reversed its decision nor attempted to reintegrate him.

(Consequences) Oprescu's independent win in the capital underscored the party's internal weaknesses and rigid decision-making processes. The incident also weakened the leadership of Mircea Geoană by exposing his inability to manage prominent figures within the party. On a broader level, it damaged PSD's image as an inclusive and democratic organization, reducing its credibility among reform-minded voters.

Analytical observations: This episode illustrates the risks of centralized control in candidate selection and the underestimation of individual political capital. It also highlights a pattern in PSD's history: sidelining popular internal actors often results in their external success and reputational damage to the party. The Geoană-Oprescu conflict serves as a case study in how procedural disputes, when unresolved, can evolve into major public defeats for party elites.

Episode-6.

Party Structures versus Loyal Individuals

(Background of the conflict) In late 2008, following the parliamentary elections, PSD entered a coalition government with the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL – Partidul Democrat Liberal), a move seen by many within the party as controversial. Gabriel Oprea, a PSD MP and former prefect of Bucharest, was appointed Minister of Interior in the new cabinet. His tenure began amidst internal skepticism due to his perceived closeness to President Traian Băsescu and the PDL leadership. Tensions within PSD escalated as Oprea made a series of appointments and public decisions without consulting the social-democrat leadership.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was ideological and strategic, with a strong external dimension linked to the influence of President Băsescu. Oprea was accused of bypassing party structures, promoting individuals loyal to external interests, and undermining party discipline. His behavior was viewed as disloyal and contrary to the expectations of internal cohesion. The situation sparked debates about PSD's relationship with state institutions and its vulnerability to presidential interference.

(Key events and dynamics) In early 2009, Oprea's appointment of a controversial secretary of state triggered outrage within PSD. Senior party figures, including Mircea Geoană and Ion Iliescu, publicly criticized him. Under mounting pressure, Oprea resigned from his ministerial position and left the party. In 2010, he formed the National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR – Uniunea Națională pentru Progresul României),

gathering disaffected members from the PSD and other parties who supported President Băsescu's agenda.

(Resolutions) The episode concluded with a formal departure and the creation of a new political entity. Oprea's resignation and subsequent formation of UNPR marked a clean break from PSD. There was no attempt at reconciliation, and the party leadership distanced itself from his actions and political direction.

(Consequences) The split weakened PSD's credibility and coherence during a delicate phase of co-governance. It exposed internal vulnerabilities and the ease with which key powerful external actors could exploit divisions within the party. The emergence of UNPR also altered coalition dynamics in Romanian politics, providing a new support base for president Băsescu aligned forces and fragmenting the left.

Analytical observations: This episode demonstrates the destabilizing impact of external political influence on internal party structures. Oprea's actions reflect the risks of appointing figures without strong loyalty to the party's core values and decision-making processes. It also exemplifies how ideological ambiguity within a party can open the door to opportunism and defection, especially when power dynamics at the national level incentivize fragmentation over loyalty.

Episode-7.

The Ghost of Factionalism

(Background of the conflict) By 2009, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) was still recovering from years of internal instability and contested leadership. Mircea Geoană remained the official president of the party, but his authority was frequently challenged. Adrian Năstase, former prime minister under Ion Iliescu's 2000-2004 presidency and a key figure in the party's technocratic wing, had reemerged as a powerful voice within the organization. Tensions between the two were rooted in divergent leadership styles, personal rivalries, and conflicting visions regarding PSD's future and its presidential strategy.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was a classic power struggle shaped by long-standing personal rivalries. Although Geoană was formally in charge, he faced mounting pressure from Năstase, who still held considerable sway over the party's technocratic elite. While they shared broadly similar ideological orientations, their political strategies and aspirations clashed. The conflict was entirely internal, centred on control of the party's structures and future candidacies.

(Key events and dynamics) In the lead-up to the 2009 presidential elections, Geoană was chosen as the PSD's candidate, despite criticism from a significant part of party leadership. After narrowly losing the election to Traian Băsescu in a highly contested runoff, Geoană's credibility was permanently damaged. Internal criticisms intensified, with Năstase openly questioning Geoană's competence and leadership. This period was marked by factional maneuvering, media attacks, and efforts to delegitimize Geoană's authority.

(Resolutions) The conflict did not result in a formal organizational split but ended with Geoană's gradual marginalization within PSD. While he remained a prominent figure for a time, his influence diminished significantly after the election defeat. Năstase consolidated his standing in the party's leadership core, though he too would soon face legal challenges that undermined his political trajectory.

(Consequences) The episode further eroded PSD's internal unity and exposed the fragility of its leadership model. The public perception of a divided party, especially during a national election, damaged its credibility. Internally, the party failed to implement meaningful reforms or strategic realignments, perpetuating a cycle of elite rivalries and unresolved structural deficiencies.

Analytical observations: This episode exemplifies the risks of unresolved internal competition in parties with weak mechanisms for elite consensus. The Geoană – Năstase conflict highlights the persistence of informal power networks and the difficulty of consolidating leadership without broad legitimacy. It also shows how electoral failure can quickly destabilize a party when factionalism remains unchecked, reinforcing a pattern of leadership fragility within PSD.

Episode-8.

Cadres Purge

(Background of the conflict) Following his loss in the 2009 presidential election and his diminished authority in PSD, Mircea Geoană continued to hold the position of President of the Senate, maintaining a degree of institutional relevance despite growing isolation within the party. Meanwhile, Victor Ponta, a younger leader with close ties to Adrian Năstase, rose through the party ranks and was elected president of PSD in 2010, representing a new generation of leadership. The relationship between Ponta and Geoană quickly became strained, especially as Ponta sought to consolidate his authority and distance the party from past electoral failures.

(Nature of the conflict) This episode was also a power struggle, characterized by generational rivalry and conflicting visions of party identity and leadership style. Geoană, although increasingly marginal, attempted to maintain a public profile and influence party strategy. Ponta viewed Geoană's continued prominence – especially as Senate President – as an obstacle to his authority and efforts to rebrand PSD. The conflict had internal roots, though it was exacerbated by public disagreements and media coverage.

(Key events and dynamics) Tensions reached a peak in late 2011, when Ponta moved to have Geoană removed from the Senate presidency, citing insubordination and disloyalty. Geoană resisted, framing the move as authoritarian and divisive. After several weeks of public tension and internal debate, PSD officially expelled Geoană from the party. This marked a dramatic end to his long standing role within the organization and generated significant media attention.

(Resolutions) The conflict ended with Geoană's expulsion from PSD and the loss of his leadership role in the Senate. The resolution was unilateral and uncompromising, with Ponta and the party leadership demonstrating their control over internal structures. Geoană continued his political career outside PSD, eventually founding the Romanian Social Party (PSRO – Partidul Social Românesc) in 2015.

(Consequences) The episode consolidated Victor Ponta's authority and marked yet another generational shift within PSD. However, it also deepened perceptions of authoritarianism in party leadership and reduced tolerance for dissent. The expulsion of a former presidential candidate further illustrated PSD's tendency to marginalize internal critics rather than mediate conflicts. Geoană's departure fragmented the party's legacy leadership and created a new, albeit minor, competitor in the center-left space.

Analytical observations: This conflict reflects the centralization of power within PSD and the use of disciplinary measures to resolve leadership disputes. It also shows how generational transitions can be managed through exclusion rather than integration. The expulsion of Geoană signaled a broader trend in Romanian party politics: elite renewal often occurs not through negotiation or institutional reform, but through abrupt and symbolic ruptures.

Episode-9.

The Great Leap Backwards

(Background of the conflict) After his resignation as prime minister and PSD leader in 2015, Victor Ponta remained an influential voice within the party, despite a gradual distancing from a very centralized leadership manner under Liviu Dragnea who took the party helm in 2015. By 2017–2018, tensions between the two figures had grown sharply. Dragnea, who consolidated control over both the party and the government, was criticized for his authoritarian leadership, clientelist practices, and controversial judicial reforms. Ponta emerged as one of the most vocal internal critics of Dragnea's direction, advocating for a return to internal democracy and institutional integrity.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was a power struggle with significant ideological and strategic implications. It pitted a reformist, pro-European vision associated with Ponta against an increasingly nationalist and illiberal agenda under Dragnea. Though both came from the same political tradition, their leadership styles, rhetoric, and policy preferences sharply diverged. The conflict was internal in origin, but shaped by broader societal tensions over corruption, governance, and Romania's European trajectory.

(Key events and dynamics) Throughout 2018, Ponta openly attacked Dragnea's leadership, accusing him of authoritarianism and undermining the rule of law. These disputes escalated in the media and in Parliament. Eventually, Ponta left PSD and founded PRO România, a new center-left party aiming to attract disillusioned PSD members but only a small portion

of social-democratic voters. Several MP's and former ministers followed him, weakening Dragnea's parliamentary support base.

(Resolutions) The conflict was resolved through a formal organizational split. Ponta's departure and the creation of PRO România institutionalized the rift, and no reconciliation took place

(Consequences) This episode marked a major moment of fragmentation for PSD. It weakened the party both internally and electorally and contributed to the erosion of its credibility among moderate and reformist voters. The emergence of PRO România reshaped for a short while the center-left and introduced a more pluralistic but also more divided political landscape. For Dragnea, the loss of Ponta and his allies exacerbated internal opposition and diminished his broader legitimacy.

Analytical observations: The Ponta – Dragnea conflict illustrates the breakdown of internal mediation mechanisms in PSD and the personalist nature of political leadership in the social-democrat's ranks. It highlights how unresolved ideological and ethical disagreements often lead to party splits rather than internal reform. The episode also reveals the fragility of party cohesion in the face of authoritarian tendencies and external societal pressures, particularly with regard to democratic norms and anti-corruption reform.

Episode-10.

A Proxy Challenger

(Background of the conflict) In early 2017, after PSD won a decisive victory in the parliamentary elections, party leader Liviu Dragnea was unable to become prime minister due to a prior penal conviction. As a result, he nominated Sorin Grindeanu, a relatively low-profile but loyal party member as head of the new government. However, once in office, Grindeanu began asserting his autonomy, distancing himself from Dragnea's directives and adopting a more moderate stance, particularly with regard to controversial judicial reforms which had provoked massive public protests nationwide.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was primarily a power struggle with a significant strategic dimension. It revolved around control over government policy and the relationship between the party apparatus and executive authority. Dragnea expected Grindeanu to act as a compliant prime minister, while Grindeanu resisted being a mere proxy. Tensions were fuelled by public backlash against a government initiated piece of legislation aimed at weakening anti-corruption legislation.

(Key events and dynamics) In June 2017, PSD leadership withdrew political support from Grindeanu, citing lack of communication and policy inefficiency. Grindeanu refused to resign, challenging the authority of the party leadership. PSD then initiated a motion of no confidence against its own government, which passed with support from a PSD loosely allied liberal leaning party, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE), and a large PSD

majority. Grindeanu was dismissed, marking the first time a ruling party toppled its own prime minister through a parliamentary procedure.

(Resolutions) The conflict ended with Grindeanu's removal from office and the appointment of a new government under another proxy social-democratic figure, Mihai Tudose. Grindeanu was expelled from PSD but later rejoined the party under different leadership. There was no formal reconciliation with Dragnea, and their relationship remained politically severed.

(Consequences) This conflict exposed the authoritarian tendencies within PSD under Dragnea and its centralized decision-making model. The event damaged the party's credibility, particularly among urban and pro-European voters. It also destabilized the government during a sensitive period marked by civil society mobilization and international scrutiny. Grindeanu's dismissal marked the beginning of a pattern of rapid changes in the office of prime minister within PSD-led governments.

Analytical observations: The Dragnea-Grindeanu episode exemplifies the tension between party discipline and executive autonomy in Romania's semi-presidential system. It highlights how perceived disloyalty even when rooted in institutional responsibility can provoke punitive measures in highly centralized parties. Moreover, it illustrates how short-term power calculations often override governance stability and public trust in democratic institutions.

Episode-11.

Another Proxy, Another Challenger

(Background of the conflict) Following the removal of Sorin Grindeanu in 2017, Liviu Dragnea supported the nomination of Mihai Tudose as the new prime minister, expecting continued loyalty to the party leadership. However, Tudose, like his predecessor, soon asserted a degree of independence, particularly in matters of cabinet appointments and public communication. The growing friction between Tudose and Dragnea culminated in early 2018, just months into Tudose's term, suggesting that structural issues within PSD leadership extended beyond isolated personal disputes.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was again a power struggle with the usual mix of strategic and personal tensions. It revolved around executive autonomy, the influence of Dragnea over governmental affairs, and the handling of internal party disputes especially concerning Minister of Internal Affairs, Carmen Dan, a Dragnea loyalist whom Tudose attempted to remove. The conflict revealed deep dysfunction in the relationship between the party leadership and 'ghost prime ministers'.

(Key events and dynamics) In January 2018, Tudose publicly criticized Carmen Dan and demanded her resignation, a move viewed as a direct challenge to Dragnea's authority. Dragnea and the PSD leadership retaliated by calling a meeting of the party's National

Executive Committee. Facing overwhelming internal pressure and loss of political support, Tudose resigned on 15 January 2018, ending his tenure as prime minister after less than seven months in office.

(Resolutions) The conflict was resolved through Tudose's forced resignation, imposed by party leadership. He was replaced by the new proxy, Viorica Dăncilă, another yet close ally of Dragnea. Tudose remained in politics but distanced himself from the PSD leadership. There was no formal reconciliation between the two figures.

(Consequences) This episode reinforced the perception of the party being led by a master puppet, Liviu Dragnea in this case, who also acted as a de facto prime minister, exercising control over the executive without assuming formal responsibility. It damaged PSD's credibility and institutional stability, suggesting a chronic inability to maintain durable leadership. Repeated prime ministerial dismissals became a symbol of internal authoritarianism and short-term political calculation.

Analytical observations: The Dragnea–Tudose conflict exemplifies systemic issues within PSD related to centralized authority, lack of internal debate, and disregard for institutional autonomy. It demonstrates the fragility of governmental leadership under a dominant party boss and the structural constraints faced by Romanian prime ministers within clientelist party systems. It also foreshadowed Dragnea's eventual downfall, as internal dissatisfaction continued to build beneath the surface of formal loyalty.

Episode-12.

A Challenge from Below

(Background of the conflict) In the second half of 2018, Liviu Dragnea faced growing dissent from within the PSD lower ranks and local leaders, despite his continued control over the central party body and government through loyalists. Gabriela Firea, then mayor of Bucharest and vice-president of the party, became increasingly vocal in criticizing Dragnea's style of leadership. She was joined by Paul Stănescu, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Regional Development, who also opposed Dragnea's centralization of power and his handling of party strategy and governance.

(Nature of the conflict) This was a power struggle with elements of strategic divergence. Firea and Stănescu opposed Dragnea's authoritarian style and what they saw as the subordination of PSD to his personal agenda, especially amid increasing judicial pressure on Dragnea. The dissenters also objected to poor policy coordination, collapse in public trust, and the marginalization of local leaders. The conflict reflected broader dissatisfaction with Dragnea's control over both party and state apparatus.

(Key events and dynamics) Firea and Stănescu issued multiple public statements against Dragnea in the autumn of 2018, culminating in an open letter signed by several party leaders demanding his resignation. In response, Dragnea orchestrated a media campaign

to discredit them and used internal party mechanisms to neutralize dissent. Firea was removed from her position as leader of the Bucharest branch of the party, and Stănescu was pressured to resign from his cabinet post. Despite retaining some support, their influence within the party was significantly reduced.

(Resolutions) The conflict ended with the marginalization of the Firea–Stănescu faction, as Dragnea reaffirmed his authority at the PSD National Executive Committee. No formal expulsions occurred, but the dissenters were sidelined from key positions. The resolution was coercive rather than reconciliatory.

(Consequences) This episode further damaged PSD's internal cohesion and reinforced the image of a party dominated by one man's agenda. It demoralized local and regional leaders, increased factionalism, and undermined the party's credibility in urban areas. It also signaled the nearing limits of Dragnea's ability to control dissent through coercion alone.

Analytical observations: The conflict with Firea and Stănescu illustrates the breakdown of internal pluralism in PSD under Dragnea. It reveals the growing cost of suppressing dissent, especially when voiced by high-profile, electorally validated leaders. The episode foreshadowed the erosion of Dragnea's internal legitimacy, which would culminate in his political downfall the following year.

Episode-13.

New Intelligentsia

(Background of the conflict) Following Liviu Dragnea's incarceration in May 2019 due to a corruption case, Viorica Dăncilă, who was then prime minister and interim president of the PSD, took full control of the party. Initially seen as a transitional figure, Dăncilă surprised many by strengthening her position and announcing her candidacy for the presidential elections that year. Meanwhile, Marcel Ciolacu — president of the Chamber of Deputies, a key party figure and a strong parliamentary presence — began building his own internal faction, positioning himself as a more moderate and pragmatic alternative.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was again a power struggle with strategic and personal dimensions. Dăncilă sought to strengthen her legitimacy and maintain the leadership position post-election, while Ciolacu and his allies questioned her authority, electoral strategy, and ability to lead the party through renewal. The rivalry reflected deeper cleavages between party traditionalists and a new cohort seeking to modernize PSD's image.

(Key events and dynamics) Following Dăncilă's poor performance in the presidential election (she failed to reach the 45% threshold in the runoff), internal criticism mounted rapidly. Ciolacu, backed by influential party barons and local branches, orchestrated a shift in party dynamics. In November 2019, under mounting pressure, Dăncilă was forced to resign from the party presidency. Ciolacu was appointed interim president by the National Executive Committee.

(Resolutions) The conflict culminated in Dăncilă's removal and Ciolacu's ascent to interim leadership, which was formalised through party procedures. Although there was no formal expulsion, Dăncilă's influence within the party was neutralised and she gradually withdrew from national politics.

(Consequences) This episode marked the end of Dragnea's legacy within the PSD. It enabled the party to start rebranding under Ciolacu, adopting a softer tone and a more institutional image. While the leadership change stabilised the party in the short term, it also highlighted ongoing difficulties in terms of both party renewal and elite circulation.

Analytical observations: The Dăncilă–Ciolacu conflict reflects a pragmatic elite realignment rather than an ideological rupture. It illustrates how electoral failure can rapidly undermine leadership legitimacy in centralized party structures. Ciolacu's ascent demonstrates the resilience of PSD's internal networks and their capacity to enforce strategic corrections after major political setbacks.

Liberal Party Conflict Episodes

The story of the liberal party in Romania is a piece of detective fiction. Expectations were high for a party aimed for a new era of liberty and democracy. The reality was often that of a party engulfed in internal ideological conflict and in searching for the mystery of the essence of liberalism in Romania.

Episode-1.

The Split: Old versus Young

(Background of the conflict) In the aftermath of the 1989 Revolution, the National Liberal Party (PNL) was re-established in January 1990 by Radu Câmpeanu. The party attracted former political dissidents, liberal intellectuals, and figures nostalgic for the pre-communist liberal tradition. At that time the internal organization of the party was weak and its identity was still in flux. Amid the rapid reconfiguration of Romanian political life, ideological and strategic disagreements emerged early within the party.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was primarily ideological, rooted in differing visions for the party's direction. While Radu Câmpeanu leaned toward a traditionalist, elitist liberalism focused on reestablishing pre-communist legitimacy, younger members such as Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu advocated for a modern, pragmatic liberalism aligned with contemporary European models. The conflict was internal in nature, and no external actor played a decisive role in its initial stages.

(Key events and dynamics) Tensions escalated during the summer and fall of 1990, as internal party debates turned public. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu and his supporters criticized the leadership style of Câmpeanu, especially his reluctance to collaborate with

emerging pro-democratic political coalitions and his perceived authoritarian approach. As disagreements intensified, Tăriceanu's faction formally broke away, founding the PNL-Young Wing (PNL-AT – Partidul Național Liberal – Aripa Tânără) in 1990.

(Resolutions) The conflict ended in a split. PNL-AT became a separate liberal entity, with a modernizing agenda and a different leadership structure. There was no reconciliation between the two factions at this stage. The original PNL, under Câmpeanu, continued independently but weakened.

(Consequences) In the short term, the split fragmented the liberal electorate and weakened the party's institutional consolidation. In the long run, however, PNL-AT positioned itself to play a more dynamic role in future alliances, especially within the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR – Convenția Democrată Română). The episode marked the beginning of a long-standing pattern of liberal fragmentation and reconfiguration.

Analytical observations: this conflict reveals the fragility of party cohesion in the early post-communist years, especially when foundational ideologies are contested. The emergence of generational and strategic cleavages so soon after the party's rebirth suggests a lack of internal democratic mechanisms. Moreover, this episode illustrates a recurring theme in PNL's history: the tension between traditionalist and modernizing currents, often personified in rival elites.

Episode-2.

The Conflict with the Scion of a Historical Liberal Party Family

(Background of the conflict) The re-founding of the National Liberal Party in early 1990 was marked by ideological diversity and leadership competition. Alongside Radu Câmpeanu, other members of the historic Brătianu family sought to reclaim positions of influence in the new political landscape. Ion Brătianu, claiming a moral and symbolic legacy of the pre-communist era Brătianu dynasty, came into conflict with the leadership style and authority claimed by Câmpeanu. This clash occurred in a period when party structures were still embryonic and legitimacy was often derived from symbolic capital rather than institutional procedures.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was both ideological and personal. On one hand, there were tensions regarding the party's ideological line and political alliances; on the other, it was a power struggle over who had the right to represent liberalism in post-communist Romania. Ion Brătianu contested Câmpeanu's claim to leadership, arguing for a more inclusive and historically-rooted liberal identity. The conflict had an internal origin, though it resonated with the broader uncertainties of political reconfiguration in 1990.

(Key events and dynamics) The dispute intensified in the second half of 1990. Ion Brătianu publicly criticized Radu Câmpeanu's unilateral decisions and attempted to claim a leadership position by invoking his family's historical contribution to Romanian liberalism.

While not as structurally disruptive as the PNL-AT split, this episode created confusion among liberal supporters and party ranks and undermined its organizational still feeble coherence. The confrontation culminated with Brătianu forming a small splinter group that failed to gain significant traction.

(Resolutions) The conflict did not result in a significant formal reorganization of the party but highlighted the fragility of internal cohesion. Ion Brătianu's dissent was not institutionalized in a separate party structure with political weight, and he remained on the margins of national political life thereafter. Radu Câmpeanu retained his leadership position.

(Consequences) The Câmpeanu-Brătianu conflict contributed to the early fragmentation of PNL's image and weakened its ability to present a unified message. Although the schism was not organizationally significant, it amplified perceptions of elitism, internal discord, and personal rivalries. This moment further delayed the party's stabilization and exposed vulnerabilities that would be exploited in future electoral competitions.

Analytical observations: this episode underscores the role of symbolic legitimacy in post-1989 Romanian politics. It reveals how unresolved tensions between historical legacy and contemporary political legitimacy can destabilize party unity. Additionally, it shows that intra-elite rivalries, even when not institutionalized, can erode public confidence and internal cohesion, particularly in formative phases of party development.

Episode-3.

Old Leaders with Different Strategic Visions

(Background of the conflict) By 1992, internal divisions within the National Liberal Party (PNL) had deepened, particularly between Radu Câmpeanu and Nicolae Cervei, another pre-communist era liberal leader. While Câmpeanu maintained a rather rigid leadership style, Cervei emerged as a vocal proponent of liberal integration into the broader democratic opposition to hegemony of the Democratic National Salvation Front. The backdrop of the conflict was the approaching 1992 general elections and the question of whether PNL should join the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR – Convenția Democrată Română), a coalition of anti-communist and center-right forces.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was both strategic and ideological. Cervei strongly supported aligning PNL with the CDR to counterbalance the dominance of the ex-communist FSN. Câmpeanu, however, opposed such a move, preferring to preserve PNL's independence. This strategic disagreement reflected deeper ideological differences regarding the nature of liberalism and its role in post-communist Romanian politics. The dispute was internal but closely connected to broader external political dynamics.

(Key events and dynamics) The confrontation reached a climax in 1992 when Cervei and his allies called for greater openness and democracy within the leadership of the National

Liberal Party (PNL) and pushed for integration into the Civic Forum of Romania (CDR). Câmpeanu resisted, which eventually led to Cervenî's faction being excluded from key party structures. In response, Cervenî and his supporters formed the National Liberal Party – Democratic Convention (PNL-CD – Partidul Național Liberal – Convenția Democrată), which subsequently joined the CDR. This organisational split signalled a definitive rupture in the liberal camp.

(Resolutions) The conflict culminated in the formation of a new liberal party, the National Liberal Party (PNL), led by Nicolae Cervenî. There was no attempt at reconciliation. This institutional split further fragmented Romanian liberalism, resulting in competing liberal groups vying for legitimacy and voter support.

(Consequences) In the short term, the split reduced the electoral strength and visibility of the Câmpeanu-led PNL. It also strengthened the CDR by incorporating Cervenî's group. In the long term, the conflict entrenched the pattern of liberal fragmentation and weakened the possibility of unified representation throughout the 1990s. The competition between PNL and PNL-CD, later named Liberal Party '93 (PL '93 – Partidul Liberal '93) continued throughout the 1990s until their eventual reunification efforts paid off.

Analytical observations: this episode reflects the difficulty of balancing ideological coherence and strategic elasticity in post-communist party building. The absence of internal democratic mechanisms made it difficult to manage dissent, while the refusal to compromise on alliances marginalized the PNL from key political developments in the decade of 1990s. This conflict demonstrates how unresolved strategic disagreements can lead to structural fragmentation in Romanian liberal politics.

Episode-4.

Once Again, All the Same: Old Leaders with Different Strategic Visions

(Background of the conflict) After the fragmentation caused by the 1992 departure of Cervenî's faction, the PNL entered a phase of introspection and reorganization. By 1993, the internal consensus around Radu Câmpeanu's leadership was crumbling. Discontent had grown due to the party's marginal position in Romanian politics and its continued self-exclusion from the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR). Mircea Ionescu-Quintus, a senior liberal figure known for his conciliatory style, emerged as an alternative leader advocating for reintegration into the CDR and a more pragmatic strategy.

(Nature of the conflict) This episode was both strategic and personal. The strategic dimension revolved around whether PNL should rejoin the CDR and reposition itself at the heart of the anti-communist opposition. The personal aspect reflected mounting frustration with Câmpeanu's autocratic leadership and his refusal to embrace internal reform. While Câmpeanu represented continuity with an increasingly isolated vision, Quintus embodied a shift towards institutional consolidation and coalition politics.

(Key events and dynamics) In 1993, internal criticism culminated in a decisive confrontation at the PNL Congress. Mircea Ionescu-Quintus challenged Câmpeanu's leadership and ultimately succeeded in being elected party president. This marked a fundamental realignment of the party's strategic orientation. Under Quintus, the PNL rejoined the CDR and began re-establishing its relevance within Romania's politics. Câmpeanu, unable to accept the leadership change, left the party in 1995, and founded the National Liberal Party 'Câmpeanu' (PNL-C – Partidul Național Liberal 'Câmpeanu'), further fragmenting the liberal camp.

(Resolutions) The resolution was formal and institutional. Quintus's victory at the party congress represented a rare moment of procedural legitimacy and peaceful leadership transition within Romanian post-communist parties. However, the resolution also resulted in further fragmentation following Câmpeanu's departure.

(Consequences) The conflict had a paradoxical effect: it temporarily weakened the liberal movement through another split, but it also revitalized the PNL institutional organizations and by allowing reintegration into the CDR consolidated the party's relevance in national politics. This strategic repositioning paved the way for electoral success later in the decade. Câmpeanu's faction remained marginal and eventually reintegrated. The conflict also helped establish new norms of internal competition and democratic procedure within the PNL.

Analytical observations: This episode is significant for demonstrating the transition from personalized to institutionalized leadership within Romanian liberalism. It highlights the internal struggle between isolationism and coalition-building, and shows that procedural legitimacy can serve as a stabilizing force even in turbulent party systems. The conflict also illustrates the recurring cost of leadership disputes: even when resolved democratically, they can result in short-term fragmentation that must later be repaired through reintegration.

Episode-5.

Different Vision of the Party's Identity and Leadership Style

(Background of the conflict) Following the disappointing electoral results of the 2000 general elections, the National Liberal Party (PNL) entered another phase of internal crisis. With Theodor Stolojan taking over the party's presidency, supported by Valeriu Stoica, a new faction advocating modernization and stronger leadership emerged. At the same time, a faction led by two liberal leaders, Horia Rusu and Nicolae Lăzărescu, expressed dissatisfaction with the direction the party was taking, particularly in terms of ideology, leadership centralization, and organizational strategy.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was both ideological and strategic, centered on the vision of the party's identity and leadership style. While Stolojan and Stoica aimed to streamline the party's internal structure and consolidate leadership authority, Rusu and Lăzărescu criticized what they saw as the erosion of liberal principles and internal

democracy. Their faction emphasised a return to authentic liberalism, encouraging greater debate and transparent decision-making processes.

(Key events and dynamics) Throughout 2000 and early 2001, tensions rose as the party leadership, under Stolojan and Stoica, sought to impose a more disciplined and centralized structure. The dissenting group led by Rusu and Lăzărescu became increasingly vocal, culminating in open criticism at party congresses and within public statements. Ultimately, this led to the exclusion of key dissenters, and by mid-2001, the marginalisation of the Rusu–Lăzărescu faction.

(Resolutions) Rather than reconciliation, the conflict was resolved through exclusion and marginalisation. The leadership under Stolojan and Stoica prevailed, and dissenters either left the party or remained politically irrelevant. There was no formal mediation process, and internal opposition was suppressed through organizational measures.

(Consequences) In the short term, the conflict solidified the control over the party of the new leadership coalesced around Theodor Stolojan and paved the way for a rebranding of PNL as a more disciplined and electorally focused political force. However, the suppression of internal debate weakened the party's liberal-democratic credentials and alienated segments of its traditional base. In the long run, this contributed to the growing perception of PNL as a pragmatic rather than ideologically consistent actor.

Analytical observations: This episode illustrates the growing tension between internal party democracy and the perceived need for organizational efficiency in post-transition Romanian politics. It also highlights the internal costs of political centralization: although it may bring short-term gains in coherence and public messaging, it can erode the ideological diversity and participatory ethos foundational to liberal parties. The Stolojan–Stoica leadership marked a turning point towards a managerial style of politics in the PNL.

Episode-6.

Liberal Networks in Conflict

(Background of the conflict) In the run-up to the 2004 general elections, the National Liberal Party (PNL) was part of the Justice and Truth Alliance (DA – Alianța Dreptate și Adevăr), formed together with the Democratic Party (PD – Partidul Democrat). The alliance presented Theodor Stolojan as its candidate for prime minister who had the pretense of representing continuity and the goal of European integration combined with an aura of professionalism. However, in a surprising move shortly before the election, Stolojan withdrew from the race, citing personal reasons. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu was quickly nominated to replace him. This sudden leadership transition triggered a latent conflict within the party that would shape internal dynamics in the years to come.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was strategic and personal. While the official narrative emphasized health-related motives for Stolojan's withdrawal, many within the party and in

the public suspected a power struggle behind the scenes. Tăriceanu's rapid rise to leadership was perceived by some as opportunistic, while others saw it as necessary for the party's electoral survival. This episode raised questions about transparency, succession planning and the influence of personal networks on party leadership decisions.

(Key events and dynamics) Following Stolojan's withdrawal, Tăriceanu became Prime Minister after the DA Alliance's electoral success. However, tensions between the two resurfaced, particularly regarding economic policy and relations with President Traian Băsescu. Stolojan, although no longer formally leading the party, remained influential and critical of Tăriceanu's governance. The rivalry became visible in internal party debates, strategic decisions, and the media.

(Resolutions) The conflict did not result in a definitive rupture as of that time. Stolojan's departure later and the formation of a competing liberal faction marked the end of any reconciliation attempts by 2006. The split institutionalized the rivalry and created a lasting cleavage in the Romanian center-right political landscape for the next decade.

(Consequences) No immediate consequence was not visible at the time but in the future it weakened the political formation through the loss of a high-profile figure and a large portion of its electorate. The long-term impact was the reconfiguration of the liberal space with the polarization of the center-right and commenced a period of greater volatility into party alliances and voter loyalty.

Analytical observations: This episode highlights how informal leadership transitions and opaque decision-making can destabilize party unity. It also underscores the personalistic nature of Romanian political leadership, where individual rivalries often override institutional structures and goals.

Episode-7.

Liberal Values in Balance Under a President's Long Shadow

(Background of the conflict) Following the 2004 elections, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu became prime minister, representing the National Liberal Party (PNL) within the governing Justice and Truth Alliance (DA) alongside the Democratic Party (PD). Initially, Theodor Stolojan supported this arrangement, but tensions soon emerged between Tăriceanu and President Traian Băsescu, the former leader of the PD, whose influence extended to Stolojan. By 2006, the alliance between the two parties was crumbling, and divisions within the National Liberal Party (PNL) began to deepen, particularly regarding the party's direction and its relationship with Băsescu.

(Nature of the conflict) This conflict was primarily ideological, with a significant external dimension, as it was fueled by pressures from President Băsescu and the PD faction. Stolojan accused Tăriceanu of abandoning reformist and center-right principles by distancing PNL from its DA partner and resisting presidential influence. Tăriceanu, on the other hand,

positioned himself as defending party autonomy and institutional balance, opposing what he saw as presidential overreach.

(Key events and dynamics) Throughout 2006, tensions escalated as Tăriceanu refused to dissolve Parliament and call early elections, a move strongly supported by Băsescu and Stolojan. In response to growing dissatisfaction, Stolojan and several PNL members defected and, by the end of 2006, formed the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD – Partidul Liberal Democrat). This split was publicly justified as a return to authentic liberalism, but it was widely perceived as having been orchestrated with the President's support.

(Resolutions) The resolution came in the form of a formal party split. The PLD was established as a separate entity and later merged with the Democratic Party in 2007 to form the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL – Partidul Democrat Liberal). There was no reconciliation between the factions at the time, and the schism remained a defining feature of Romanian center-right politics for several years.

(Consequences) The immediate impact was the weakening of PNL, which lost several high-profile members. Strategically, the emergence of PLD (and subsequently PDL) restructured the center-right field, establishing a new dominant force aligned with President Băsescu. The conflict also eroded public trust in liberal unity and contributed to political instability within the governing coalition.

Analytical observations: This episode reflects the profound influence of external actors, particularly the presidency, on intra-party dynamics in Romania. It also reveals the fragility of alliances built on expediency rather than ideological coherence. The conflict between Tăriceanu and Stolojan illustrates how ideological disputes, when compounded by external pressures and personal rivalries, can lead to long-term institutional fragmentation and party system realignment.

Episode-8.

Another President, Another Shadow

(Background of the conflict) In 2014, the National Liberal Party (PNL) was undergoing a transformation following its withdrawal from the Social Liberal Union (USL – Uniunea Social Liberală) coalition, which had governed alongside the Social Democratic Party (PSD). In the wake of this shift, Klaus Iohannis, the then-mayor of Sibiu and a recent political figure on the national stage, was endorsed by the PNL leadership as the party's candidate for the presidential election. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, a former PNL prime minister and a proponent of continued cooperation with the PSD, opposed this decision. The resulting clash highlighted both ideological and strategic divisions within the liberal camp.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was both ideological and strategic, with a strong external dimension. Tăriceanu supported the continuation of the USL project and closer ties with PSD, advocating for a centrist-to-left orientation. Iohannis, backed by the newly

merged PNL–PDL alliance, stood for a center-right realignment and open opposition to PSD. The two visions were fundamentally incompatible, and the conflict escalated rapidly.

(Key events and dynamics) As the 2014 presidential campaign approached, Tăriceanu vocally criticized the direction PNL was taking under Iohannis and the merger with PDL. In March 2014, he resigned from the PNL and announced the formation of a new party, the Liberal Reformist Party (PLR – Partidul Liberal Reformat). He then ran for president himself, further deepening the split. Although he received a low percentage of votes, his candidacy weakened the liberal camp's coherence and diverted attention during a critical electoral period.

(Resolutions) The conflict was resolved through a formal split. Tăriceanu did not return to PNL and later merged PLR with other political entities to form the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE – Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților). There was no reconciliation, and the split resulted in a lasting division within Romania's liberal spectrum.

(Consequences) This conflict led to the permanent departure of Tăriceanu from the PNL and the creation of a new party competing for a similar electorate. It also altered the structure of the Romanian liberal space, with ALDE occupying a centrist-liberal niche, while PNL moved firmly to the center-right. The rivalry contributed to some polarization and reduced the ideological cohesion of the liberal tradition.

Analytical observations: This episode illustrates how leadership disputes, compounded by diverging strategic visions, can lead to lasting fragmentation. The emergence of ALDE reflects a broader trend in Romanian politics where political realignment often results in organizational splits rather than internal compromise. It also highlights the challenges of integrating new leadership figures like President Iohannis into legacy party structures, especially when older elites remain influential and committed to ideologically different paths.

Episode-9.

The Search for Economic Liberalism

(Background of the conflict) By 2019, a new leader, Ludovic Orban, had solidified his position within the National Liberal Party (PNL), positioning the party as the principal center-right force in Romania and in opposition to the ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD). As the party prepared for upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, internal tensions began to resurface, especially concerning ideological coherence and leadership style. Viorel Cataramă, a long-standing liberal and economic hardliner, criticized the direction Orban was taking the party, accusing him of abandoning classical liberal principles.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was ideological, rooted in fundamental disagreements over the party's economic vision and its commitment to liberal doctrine. Cataramă advocated for a return to free-market fundamentalism and criticized Orban for what

he perceived as populist compromises and an overreliance on state intervention. While personal elements were also present, the dispute primarily revolved around doctrinal purity versus electoral pragmatism.

(Key events and dynamics) Throughout 2018 and into early 2019, Cataramă became an increasingly vocal presence in the media and at party forums, demanding a platform for internal ideological debate. However, his proposals were met with resistance and ultimately rejected by the Orban-led leadership. In May 2019, after being excluded from the party's internal decision-making processes, Cataramă left the PNL and founded the Liberal Right (DL – Dreapta Liberală), a political formation claiming to represent unfiltered liberal values.

(Resolutions) The conflict was resolved by a formal split, with no attempt at mediation or internal compromise. Cataramă's exit was portrayed by party leadership as marginal and non-representative, while the Liberal Right remained a minor player in Romanian politics with limited electoral appeal.

(Consequences) In the short term, the split had little electoral or structural impact on the PNL. However, it reinforced the perception that the party had drifted away from doctrinal liberalism in favor of electoral success and coalition politics. Cataramă's departure highlighted the narrowing space for ideological dissent within PNL and the increasing dominance of centralized leadership.

Analytical observations: This episode underscores the tension between ideological identity and strategic flexibility in a maturing party system. While the conflict did not shake the PNL's electoral prospects, it revealed a deep undercurrent of dissatisfaction among classical liberals. It also signals the decline of internal pluralism in favor of top-down control, a pattern seen in other Romanian parties undergoing institutional consolidation.

Episode-10.

Could There Be a Technocracy Guided by Liberal Values?

(Background of the conflict) In 2021, the National Liberal Party (PNL) was the most relevant party in the governing coalition following the 2020 elections, with Florin Cîțu serving as Prime Minister and Ludovic Orban as the party's president. Despite initial cooperation, tensions quickly emerged between the two leaders, fueled by differing governance styles, internal party ambitions, and external pressures, particularly from President Klaus Iohannis. The conflict escalated in the context of the party's internal leadership race.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was both ideological and personal, with a strong external dimension linked to President Iohannis's involvement. While both Orban and Cîțu identified with center-right liberalism, their leadership approaches diverged significantly. Orban emphasized party unity and continuity in liberal more market based approaches to economy, while Cîțu, with the backing of Iohannis, positioned himself as a reformer with

a strong technocratic vision. Behind the scenes, institutional power struggles and control over key government appointments intensified the conflict.

(Key events and dynamics) The leadership race formally began in mid-2021, and quickly turned into a public and polarizing battle. Cîțu received open support from President Iohannis and a significant segment of the party establishment, while Orban mobilized traditional party structures and grassroots members. The September 2021 PNL Congress culminated in Orban's defeat and Cîțu's election as party president. Shortly after, Orban publicly criticized the influence of the president and accused PNL of abandoning liberal values.

(Resolutions) The conflict concluded with Orban's removal from party leadership and, shortly thereafter, his resignation from PNL. In December 2021, he announced the formation of a new political party, The Right's Force (FD – Forța Dreptei). There was no reconciliation, and the split reflected a deep internal rift.

(Consequences) This conflict significantly damaged PNL's public image and strongly affected its internal cohesion. It highlighted the growing influence of external actors, especially the presidency on party decisions. The formation of FD further fragmented the liberal center-right electorate. The conflict also weakened PNL's ability to govern cohesively during the critical Covid-19 pandemic period.

Analytical observations: This episode reflects the increasing personalization of leadership contests in Romanian politics and the role of presidential influence in intra-party dynamics. It also demonstrates the fragility of elite consensus in governing coalitions and the erosion of intra-party mechanisms for conflict resolution. The emergence of The Right's Force marks yet another chapter in the recurring cycle of splintering and reconfiguration within Romanian liberalism.

Episode-11.

Could the Whole Liberal Party Be Transformed into a Technocratic Disciplined Bureaucracy?

(Background of the conflict) By 2022, Nicolae Ciucă had become the dominant figure in the National Liberal Party (PNL), following the resignation of Florin Cîțu and the party's entry into a grand coalition government with the Social Democratic Party (PSD). Ciucă's appointment as party president, despite his background as a non-political military leader, marked a shift toward a more centralized and technocratic leadership style. Within this context, Robert Sighiartău – an established figure in the party's more ideologically active and traditionally liberal faction – began voicing criticism about the direction PNL was taking.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was of a mixed and organizational nature, involving disagreements over party governance, communication strategies, and political identity.

Sighiartău criticized the increasing bureaucratization and top-down control within the party, as well as the diminishing influence of internal democratic debate. He also opposed certain compromises made with the PSD that he considered to be inconsistent with the liberal tradition.

(Key events and dynamics) Throughout 2022, Sighiartău expressed his dissent both in internal forums and public appearances. He criticized the leadership's lack of engagement with party members and decision-making transparency. The conflict reached its peak during key debates on party reforms and internal restructuring, in which Ciucă's leadership marginalized dissenting voices. Although Sighiartău was not formally expelled, he was gradually sidelined from the decision-making core of the party.

(Resolutions) There was no formal resolution to the conflict, but its outcome was effectively decided through institutional marginalization. Ciucă's leadership remained uncontested due to broad support from both the presidential faction and party elites. Sighiartău's influence within the party waned, and he became increasingly absent from central political processes.

(Consequences) This episode further consolidated Ciucă's disciplined bureaucratic control over PNL but at the cost of reduced ideological pluralism and internal dialogue. It reinforced a managerial style of leadership focused on administrative control rather than political debate. The sidelining of Sighiartău signaled to other dissenters the limits of acceptable opposition within the party and deepened internal passivity.

Analytical observations: The conflict between Ciucă and Sighiartău illustrates the transformation of PNL into a more hierarchical and executive-led party. While effective in ensuring organizational discipline, this model risks eroding democratic mechanisms and alienating ideological voices.

Episode-12.

Are Issues of Family and Religious Faith Liberal?

(Background of the conflict) In 2023, the National Liberal Party (PNL) continued to be led by Nicolae Ciucă, whose leadership style had further centralized control within the party. Meanwhile, internal tensions were rising due to the party's close collaboration with the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and a perceived ideological drift away from traditional liberalism. Ben-Oni Ardelean, a long-time PNL MP known for his conservative and Christian-democratic leanings, emerged as a prominent critic of the party's direction.

(Nature of the conflict) The conflict was primarily ideological, with a secondary strategic dimension. Ardelean opposed what he considered the abandonment of the party's identity and principles, especially concerning issues of family, faith, and conservative values. He also criticized the lack of internal transparency and debate, as well as the leadership's focus on administrative alliances over ideological coherence. The conflict was internal but reflected broader concerns about the erosion of ideological diversity within Romanian parties.

(Key events and dynamics) Throughout 2023, Ardelean voiced dissent in public speeches, interviews, and party forums. His critiques targeted both the leadership's ideological compromises and its increasing reliance on presidential and technocratic influence. In response, the party leadership distanced itself from Ardelean's positions, eventually leading to his departure. By the end of 2023, he founded a new political initiative called Movement of Hope (MS – Mișcarea Speranței), focused on Christian-democratic and family-centered policies.

(Resolutions) The conflict ended with a definitive split. Ardelean left PNL and launched his own political project, marking a clean break from the party's dominant trajectory. There was no attempt at reconciliation or internal mediation, and the party treated his exit as marginal.

(Consequences) While the immediate electoral impact was minor, the departure of Ardelean signaled a growing dissatisfaction among more conservative segments of the liberal electorate. The foundation of the Movement of Hope (MS) created an alternative space for voters disillusioned with the technocratic direction of PNL. It also further emphasized the trend of fragmentation and ideological polarization within Romania's center-right.

Analytical observations: This episode exemplifies the ideological thinning of mainstream parties under the pressure of pragmatism and institutional consolidation. Ardelean's departure reflects the narrowing tolerance for internal ideological diversity and the marginalization of religiously conservative voices. The emergence of MS adds to the ongoing pattern in Romanian liberalism: unresolved internal dissent frequently results not in negotiation or reform, but in organizational splintering and party proliferation.

Comparing the Strings

Comparing the internal power dynamics of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the National Liberal Party (PNL) in Romania reveals significant contrasts in their approaches to conflict management, leadership struggles, and organizational resilience. Both parties have experienced intense internal disputes that have shaped their political trajectories, but the nature, resolution, and long-term impact of these conflicts differ considerably, reflecting their distinct organizational cultures and historical contexts.

First, the typology of conflicts within PSD and PNL highlights notable differences in the underlying causes and intensities of internal strife. PNL's conflicts more often center on ideological and strategic disagreements, reflecting the party's liberal and individualistic ethos. In contrast, PSD's internal struggles frequently slide into power contests with a strong personal dimension, shaped by the party's hierarchical structure and centralized leadership.

The mechanisms for resolving internal conflicts also differ significantly between the two parties. PNL has historically managed its disputes through factional splits and the creation

of splinter parties, reflecting a more fluid and decentralized approach to party organization. For example, the 1992 departure of Niculae Cervenii and the formation of PL '93, as well as the 2006 creation of the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD – Partidul Liberal Democrat) by Theodor Stolojan, illustrate a pattern of breaking away rather than negotiating internal settlements. In contrast, PSD has typically responded to internal dissent with expulsions, marginalizations, or coercive loyalty enforcement, as seen, for example, in the 2011 expulsion of Mircea Geoană and the 2018 suppression of the Firea-Stănescu faction. This reflects a preference for maintaining centralized control over the party's direction, even at the cost of long-term factional stability.

The impact of these conflicts on party structure and leadership has also varied. PNL's frequent ideological splits have often resulted in significant organizational fragmentation, but also periodic cycles of consolidation and renewal. For instance, the formation of PLD in 2006 and its subsequent merger with the Democratic Party (PD) to form the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL – Partidul Democrat Liberal) marked a major reconfiguration of the center-right landscape in Romania. PSD, by contrast, has tended to maintain its organizational coherence despite repeated leadership crises, such as the 2017 dismissal of Sorin Grindeanu and the 2018 expulsion of Mihai Tudose. This reflects the party's greater institutional resilience but also a higher tolerance for centralized, personality-driven leadership.

Generational dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the conflict landscape within both parties. PNL has often experienced leadership turnover driven by ideological renewal, as seen in the 2004 conflict between Theodor Stolojan and Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, which marked a generational shift towards a more modern, pro-European liberalism. PSD's generational transitions, by contrast, have often been marked by sharp internal divides, such as the 2005 contest between Geoană and Iliescu and the 2019 leadership change from Dăncilă to Ciolacu. These transitions have typically involved more intense power struggles, reflecting the party's hierarchical structure and strong leader-centric culture.

External pressures have also shaped the nature and outcomes of these internal conflicts. PNL's history of alliances and mergers reflects a higher degree of responsiveness to shifting political landscapes, such as the integration into the European People's Party (EPP) and the subsequent ideological realignments. PSD, meanwhile, has often resisted such external influences, maintaining a more insulated organizational identity despite periodic challenges, such as the 2007 departure of Teodor Meleșcanu and the 2022 exit of Viorica Dăncilă.

The internal dynamics of PNL and PSD reveal two distinct models of political conflict. PNL's liberal ethos has fostered a more fragmented but adaptive organizational culture, while PSD's centralized leadership structure has created a more stable but often rigid power hierarchy. Understanding these patterns is essential for interpreting the broader trajectory of Romanian party politics and the ongoing challenges of democratic consolidation.

Conclusions

This study examined the internal power struggles within Romania's two dominant political parties, the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD), from 1990 to 2025. A structured analytical framework was used to map the origins, nature, dynamics, resolutions and consequences of intra-party conflicts. The findings provide valuable insights into the internal fragility and external adaptability of political parties in a post-communist, semi-presidential democracy.

This study also underscores the importance of leadership personalisation in Romanian political life. In both parties, conflicts have been less about programmatic debates and more about controlling resources, particularly at a local level, controlling candidacies at a central level and, at times, personal prestige and symbolic leadership. This pattern reveals a persistent reliance on informal networks and charismatic authority rather than democratic internal deliberation. While generational shifts have often triggered elite-level competition, these transitions have rarely been consensual or strategic; more commonly, they have been marked by abrupt ruptures or expulsions.

From a systemic perspective, the analysed cases demonstrate that Romania's party system was vulnerable to the volatility of its leadership. While external pressures, such as presidential interference, European integration or mass protest movements, have occasionally acted as catalysts for internal change, they have rarely presented opportunities for meaningful reform. Intra-party conflicts, however, have tended to produce fragmentation, reduced legitimacy and weaker programme clarity. This corroborates the view of the broader literature that, if left unresolved, internal party conflict tends to degrade organisational coherence and electoral performance in emerging democracies.

Nevertheless, the endurance of both PSD and PNL over a 35-years period is notable. Despite fragmentation, expulsion of leaders, and intense factional battles, both parties have survived and even thrived electorally. This resilience is paradoxical and speaks to the adaptability of elite structures even when the ideological or institutional foundations are weak. In this sense, Romanian political parties illustrate a form of 'unstable stability' or a form of organizational continuity built not on consensus or democratic routines, but on elite control and short-term adaptability to pressures to democratize.

Limited intra-party elite-level conflicts are not anomalies in the Romanian context but core features of political life. Understanding them offers a lens through which to interpret electoral strategies, institutional design, and party identity in a still-consolidating democracy. Future research could benefit from extending this framework to other Romanian parties, as well as from testing the findings in comparative perspectives across Central and Eastern Europe.

Abbreviations list

ALDE – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților)
ApR – Alliance for Romania (Alianța pentru România)
CDR – Romanian Democratic Convention (Convenția Democrată Română)
DA – Justice and Truth Alliance (Alianța Dreptate și Adevăr)
DL – Liberal Right (Dreapta Liberală)
FD – The Right's Force (Forța Dreptei)
FDSN – Democratic National Salvation Front (Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale)
FSN – National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Naționale)
MS – Movement of Hope (Mișcarea Speranței)
PD – Democratic Party (Partidul Democrat)
PDAR – Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania (Partidul Democrat Agrar din România)
PDL – Democratic Liberal Party (Partidul Democrat Liberal)
PDSR – Party of Social Democracy in Romania (Partidul Democrației Sociale în România)
PL '93 – Liberal Party '93 (Partidul Liberal '93)
PLD – Liberal Democratic Party (Partidul Liberal Democrat)
PLR – Liberal Reformist Party (Partidul Liberal Reformativ)
PNL – National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal)
PNL-AT – National Liberal Party – Young Wing (Partidul Național Liberal – Aripa Tânăra)
PNL-C – National Liberal Party 'Câmpeanu' (Partidul Național Liberal 'Câmpeanu')
PNL-CD – National Liberal Party – Democratic Convention (Partidul Național Liberal – Convenția Democrată)
PNȚCD – National Peasant's Christian Democrat Party (Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat)
PSD – Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat)
PSD-CTP – Social Democratic Party 'Constantin Titel Petrescu' (Partidul Social Democrat 'Constantin Titel Petrescu')
PSDR – Romanian Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat Român)
PSRO – Romanian Social Party (Partidul Social Românesc)
UDMR – Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România)
UL-B – 'Brătianu' Liberal Union (Uniunea Liberală 'Brătianu')
UNPR – National Union for the Progress of Romania (Uniunea Națională pentru Progresul României)
USL – Social Liberal Union (Uniunea Social Liberală)

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