The 2008 Election Moment. Iasi, the First Uninominal Elections

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Abstract:
In this article we try to present and briefly analyze the local and the parliamentary elections from 2008 in Iasi County. Through this paper we intend to reveal the voters’ expectations in terms of electoral offer, and also the desirable dominant traits of the candidates proposed by the main political parties, through the choices at the polls.

The results of these elections have revealed two contradictory features in the options of the electorate: at the local level, we can clearly see a trend of preserving local structures, voters going for the incumbent candidate for the seat of the Mayor and for the County Council they voted for a well-known person, with the highest degree of notoriety, certified by two terms as Mayor of Iasi; while in the general elections, a renewal trend of the Romanian Parliament, long waited as a renewal of the entire political class, was clearly seen.

Keywords:
local elections Iasi, uninominal vote, uninominal colleagues.

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With Romania's accession to EU in 2007, and the need to align to European standards regarding the representation of voters in national parliaments, our country adopted a model of uninominal vote, used in some European democracies and other countries. The string of electoral campaigns in 2008 began with local elections for the Mayor's office, city and County Council. It was the first electoral confrontation with a particularly important stake, since the elected representatives of the parties would lead in the next four years the destiny of the local communities. Also, they were to hold the levers of power with which they could support their own parties in the perspective of the general elections that were to be held at the end of the year.

1. Local elections

The race for the local elections in Iasi County was opened by the municipal elections and those for the Presidency of the County Council (uninominal elections for the first time in post-revolutionary history, the candidate being elected after a single round).

Important names entered the confrontation:

- Gheorghe Nichita - Mayor in office, from the Social Democratic Party (PSD), having the advantage of almost one and a half mandate as the Mayor in office.
- Dumitru Oprea – MEP of the Liberal Democratic Party and former rector of the University A.I. Cuza, a „heavy” name in terms of reputation and good image forged as rector of the University.
- Cristian Adomnitei - MP and Minister of Education from the National Liberal Party, with a high degree of reputation - unfortunately, mostly negative - during his tenure in Government.
- Irina Schrotter – a known fashion designer and filmmaker of various shows on national TV, entered as an independent, renounces just before the electoral campaign, announcing the unconditional support for PDL candidate, Professor Dumitru Oprea.
To a great extent, the fight was between the top three candidates, which were in fact representing the main political forces involved in the election race.

If Cristian Adomnitei, minister still in office, had the handicap of being a representative of the party in power, and also entered late in the election race, the other two candidates enjoyed the electoral support of both parties in the contest for first place, PSD and PDL respectively, both being quoted in pre-campaign surveys with percentages between 30 and 35%.

The first round ended with the victory of the incumbent mayor, Gheorghe Nichita, closely followed by Dumitru Oprea and third Cristian Adomnitei. Neither managed to get that much dreamed 50% + 1 votes, a percentage that would empower him directly as Mayor.

The second round, held after 15 days, brought face to face the two main aspirants: the Mayor, Nichita, which entered the race from the first position and Professor Oprea, at a difference of a few percents, but hoping to obtain the votes of the Liberals, of those left without a candidate.

Unfortunately for Dumitru Oprea, the votes of the unrepresented right wing votes were divided between the two candidates, the PSD candidate winning with 54% of the votes.

From the perspective of the topic and general elections, it is very important how was voted according to the districts and the social status of the electorate.

Based on how the people voted in the first round, Nichita's victory, in Alexandru, Dacia, Nicolina, Podu Ros, Cantemir or Frumoasa districts, could be counterbalanced by Oprea's victory in areas like Center, Canta, Păcurari and Copou. In fact, the number of votes for each district was the key. Alexandru district had a share of 12% of the total electorate in Iasi, Dacia of 8.7% and Oancea, with Ciurchi and Gradinari, of 8.3%. From these areas Gheorghe Nichita collected no less than 14,000 votes in the first round, out of about 43,000 (ie, a third). The areas where Oprea won mattered less, something more important was Păcurari, accounting for 8.5% of the electorate, while the Central area had a weight of only 1.8% and Copou with about 5%, from the total number of electors of the city Iasi.
Dumitru Oprea took around 7,000 votes of these areas, out of 36,500 obtained (ie, a fifth).

In the second round, both candidates had a campaign strategy focusing on large districts - Alexandru, Dacia, Oancea- Tatarasi, with an accent on voters who already voted for them in the first round and a message for the voters of the Liberals. The strategy paid off for both sides, and the result was that the initial difference was preserved.

PSD leaded in Alexandru, by placing a stage and screen in the middle of the district, and PDL has focused on Dacia and Oancea, where it mounted screens for watching European Cup matches and has sent the bulk of the activists in the field. The effects were visible in the final results: Gheorghe Nichita increased in Alexandru from 54% in the first round to 64% in the second, and Dumitru Oprea in Dacia, with an increase from 32% in the first round to 43% in the second, with a close win in Tatarasi South. The most important was Nichita's victory in Alexandru (the district with the largest share of the total electorate), where after the first hour of voting the Mayor had an unbelievable 97%. Differences of votes in favor of Gheorghe Nichita were recorded in areas like Podu Roș, Cantemir, Bucium, Socola and Galata, Mîrcea – i.e. areas less developed or where the majority of voters are pensioners.

The first round polls showed that voters of Cristian Adomnitei were divided into relatively equal parts between Dumitru Oprea and Gheorghe Nichita, with a slight advantage for the first. The voters in the first round preserved their choice for each side. Moreover, each has succeeded in raising a few thousand votes: Gheorghe Nichita from 43,000 to nearly 56,000, and Dumitru Oprea from 36,500 to 47,400.

But the victory for Mayor Gheorghe Nichita would not bring the victory of PSD in the City Council. Of the 27 councilors, 12 were to be of PDL, 11 of PSD and only 4 of PNL.

The election for the County Council Presidency, in 2008 brought a novelty: uninominal vote in one lap. For this race three candidates with good reputation and previous experience in electoral campaigns have engaged in battle:

- Constantin Simirad - PSD - former Mayor of Iasi for two and a half terms, was Ambassador to Cuba, former Professor;
- Dan Carlan - Senator, President of PDL County organization, a person with a lot of political experience;
1. Traian Dobre - Liberal MP, member of the Permanent County Bureau, candidate with huge influence in rural areas; The fight was decided mainly in urban areas, the majority of votes tilting the balance for the PSD candidate, C-tin Simirad: 47% of the total votes cast.

Interesting was the distribution of votes for the County Council, considered as a political vote on parties and virtually prefiguring a possible rehearsal for general elections: from the total of 36 county councilors (the 37th being the President), 13 seats belonged to PSD, 13 to PDL and 10 to PNL.

The good results of PNL may come as a surprise, this was due to the rural areas where the liberal Mayors had a rate of over 30% of all County Mayors.

2. Parliamentary elections

In the fall 2008 a lot of surveys were being offered, more or less strange, with many twists in the configuration of the parties' leadership, PDL and PSD (at that time, in alliance with PC) led alternatively, with percentages ranging between 25% and 35%, with PNL somewhere between 15 and 20%, UDMR just over 5%, and the remaining parties under the electoral threshold: PRM, PNG, Green Party etc.

The electoral law proposed by the Government and voted by the Parliament, presented a novelty in Romania: the uninominal vote in urban and rural districts. Without going into details regarding the separation of these and the redistribution of votes by party, two aspects are important:

- the candidate who obtains 50% +1 of the votes is automatically the winner and becomes MP (in Parliament);
- candidates who do not meet this criterion, but are placed in the top three places can win the college, according to the number of votes and ranking in the hierarchy of the candidates and the percentage obtained by the party in the County.

At the time, Iasi County was ranked second as number of inhabitants, that's why is represented in Parliament by 17 elected, 5
senators and 12 deputies, being divided into urban and rural colleges as follows:

- Deputies College 1 (Răducăneni) - comprising 15 towns with 56,363 inhabitants- where Luminita Iordache (PSD), Traian Dobre (PNL) and Constantin Serban (PDL) candidated;
- Deputies College 2 (Tomești) - covering 13 towns and 74,327 inhabitants, where Relu Fenechiu (PNL), Daniel Mățăsăru (PSD) and Dragomir Tomașescu (PDL) competed;
- Deputies College 3 (Țibănești) - covering 14 towns and 61,808 people - candidates were Petru Movila (PDL), Cristian Nechifor (PSD) and Lucian Simirad (NLP);
- Deputies College 4 (Tg.Frumos) - 14 communities and 74,081 inhabitants - candidates were Vasile Mocanu (PSD), Valerian Sălăvâstru (PNL) and Liviu Bulgaru (PDL);
- Deputies College 5 (Pascani) - 8 towns and 76,018 people - candidates were Neculai Ratoi (PSD), Valerica Andronache (PDL) and Vasile Gaboran (NLP);
- Deputies College 6 (Hârlău) - 15 settlements with 76,291 inhabitants – candidates were Anghel Stanciu (PSD), Eugen Țicău (PNL) and Constantin Leonte (PDL);
- Deputies College 7 (Podu Iloaiei) - 17 towns with 74,059 inhabitants - candidates were Cristian Adomnitei (PNL), Narciza Nedelcu (PDL) and Vasile Catea (PSD);
- Deputies College 8 - Iasi North (Center, Copou, Pacurari, V.Lupului) - 73,842 people - candidates Tudor Ciuhoodaru (PSD), Dan Carlan (PDL) and Camelia Gavrila (PNL);
- Deputies College 9 - Iasi (Dacia, Alexandru) - 73,892 people - Daniel Oajdea (PDL), Doru Tompa (PSD) and Constantin Fatu (PNL);
- Deputies College 10 - Iasi (Tătărași – Moara de Vânt) - 58,656 people - Marius Spînu (PDL), Sorin Iacoban (PSD) and Neculai Volovat (PNL);
- Deputies College 11 - Iasi (CUG- Industrial area) - 59,385 people - Costi Neagu (PDL), Catalin Ivan (PSD) and Cristina Dobre (PNL);
Deputies College 12 - Iasi (Nicolina) - 58,188 people - Nicusor Paduraru (PDL), Valer Dorneanu (PSD) and Mugur Cozmanciuc (PNL);

In addition to these 12 MPs, 5 senatorial colleagues have been added:

- Senate Rural College 1 – superimposed on Deputies Colleges 1, 2 and 3, where Varujan Vosganian (PNL), Marian Enache (PSD) and Iulian Serban (PDL) candidated;
- Senate Rural College 2 - superimposed on Deputies Colleges 4 and 7, where Radu Terinte (PNL), Sorin Lazar (PSD) and Lucian Fiașer (PDL) candidated;
- Senate Rural College 3 - superimposed on Deputies Colleges 5 and 6, where Florin Constantinescu (PSD), Leonard Rusu (PDL) and Dorina Isopescu (PNL) candidated;
- Senate College Iasi 4 - superimposed on Deputies Colleges 8 and 9, where Mihaela Popa (PDL), Ioan Nani (PSD) and Miînea Humbuzache (PNL) candidated;
- Senate College Iasi 5 - superimposed on Deputies Colleges 10, 11 and 12, where Dumitru Oprea (PDL), Constantin Neculau (PSD) and Marin Burlea (PNL) competed.

We have shown in the above list the winners of the uninominal colleges in Iasi. Without going into too much detail, analyzing the above data, several conclusions can be underlined:

- there were no first poll winners of the college (to achieve 50% + 1 votes), fact explained by the low notoriety of the candidates, or by the very close fight (especially in Iasi), between the top three parties;
- the candidates placed in the first place didn't necessarily won, but sometimes those placed second (a case is the Senate Rural College 2, where the rightful winner was Radu Terinte (PNL) with 33.72%, but the percentage of the party did not allow the second place, as senator being declared the PSD candidate, Sorin Lazar (former Mayor of Strunga!);
- there was a case in which MP was declared the third placed candidate, i.e. Cristina Dobre (PNL), which, with a rate of only 13.54% (approx. 2,000 votes) won after redistribution
the Deputies College 11 Iasi (instead of PDL candidate, Costi Neagu-40.05%);

- after the centralization of mandates in Iasi County, PSD won five parliamentary seats (four rural and one urban) and two senators (both rural), practically winning the elections, followed by PDL with 4 mandates (3 urban, 1 rural) and two senators (both urban) and PNL with 3 mandates (2 rural and one urban) and one for senator(rural).

The score obtained by each of the three parliamentary parties in both houses of the Parliament and the comparison between local and national elections are shown in the graphs below:

![Parliamentary elections, Chamber of Deputies, Iasi County](image)

The 38.84% obtained by the PSD-PC alliance for the Chamber of Deputies, Iasi County, have resulted in 5 parliamentary seats, followed by PDL with 4 seats (35.18%) and PNL with 3 (25.98%).
The results for the Senate were very close to those for the Chamber of Deputies, PSD-PC obtaining 2 seats of senators, followed by PDL with 2 seats and PNL with one.

The following graphs reflect the percentage obtained by the parliamentary parties in Iasi, compared to the the national percentages, noting that the percentages are unweighted, hence their slightly lower value than the previous charts.

The conclusion is: the largest increase was registered by PNL, with over four percent more than at the national level, in the second place, PSD-PC, with a rate above the national average and in the third place PDL, with almost one percent less than the national average.
Conclusions:

After the voting process ended in the fall of 2008, we can draw the following conclusions regarding the uninominal elections for the Parliament of Romania, in Iasi County:

1. Regarding the distribution of seats for the urban areas, 5 deputies and two senators, PDL was the winner, getting five of these

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places (Dumitru Oprea, Mihaela Popa at the Senate, and Marius Spînu, Nicusor Paduraru and Daniel Oajdea as deputies), all these candidates competing for the first time - new entry in Parliament.

2. PSD and PNL have won each one seat (Tudor Ciuhodaru and Cristina Dobre), both of them at the first run for Parliament, and this, in spite of the fact that they were credited with the second or third chance, but due to the peculiarities of the uninominal vote, those regarding the redistribution of seats.

3. The surprising defeat of the PSD in urban areas, taking into account the results of local elections for Mayors office, city and County Council.

4. Important candidates from the competing parties, such as Valer Dorneanu, Doru Tompea or Constantin Neculau (PSD), Dan Carlan (PDL), Camelia Gavrila or Burlea Marin (PNL) have lost the elections.

5. We can say that the big winners of 2008 in Iasi were the “Snow White” type candidates, as Sebastian Lăzăroiu recently called them, candidates without notoriety in politics, but electorally desirable, and the great losers were the politicians with experience, who it seems, the voters no longer wanted.

A general conclusion would be that the results of these elections have revealed two contradictory features in the options of the electorate: at the local level, we can clearly see a trend of preserving local structures, voters going for the incumbent candidate for the seat of Mayor, as for the County Council they voted for a well-known person, with the highest degree of notoriety, certified by two terms as Mayor of Iasi; while in the general elections, a renewal trend of the Romanian Parliament, long waited as a renewal of the entire political class, was clearly seen.

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