A Response to the Interview with Mr. Tudor Barbu, Vice-President of the People’s Party – Dan Diaconescu

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Until the legislative elections of December 2012, Romania was the only Eastern European country in which no new political parties had entered the parliamentary arena for two decades. Since 1992, only a handful of political parties have secured parliamentary seats and thus participated in coalition governments. Among these parties, some have failed to retain their parliamentary seats and have never managed to return to the legislature, e.g. the Romanian National Unity Party and the Christian Democratic National Peasants Party in 2000, and the Greater Romania Party (PRM) in 2008. At the same time, there were many failures of other political competitors, such as the Alliance for Romania and Union of Right Forces (2000), the Socialist Alliance Party or the New Generation Party (in several elections), to gain parliamentary representation. In this reliably partisan environment, any party emerging a few months prior to elections has obtained quite modest electoral results, even when gaining legislative seats.

The performance of the People’s Party – Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD) in the most recent parliamentary elections in Romania went against all these trends. The party was officially registered on 19 September 2011 and held its first congress in January 2012. Less than half a year later, in June 2012, it achieved third place in the local elections, with almost 9% of the vote. In the legislative elections, the PP-DD was again in the third position but with a better result: it obtained approximately 14.5% of the votes in both Chambers of Parliament. The PP-DD received only 3% less than the Liberal-Democratic Party, the leader of the coalition government between December 2008 and April 2012. Moreover, compared with the closed list proportional representation system used until 2008, the high level of PP-DD’s popularity deserves particular consideration. It performed well in a system where voting takes place in single member

The PP-DD’s formation and political development are closely linked to the popular appeal of its leader, Dan Diaconescu, the owner of Oglinda TV (OTV). The prominent role of the leader is reflected in the party’s name. There are only a few cases in which the founder or president of the party was included in the name of a Romanian party. This either happened in the inter-war period or after 1989 with political parties characterized by low electoral support (e.g. PNL-Campeanu). To complete the picture, it is worth noting that Dan Diaconescu has been the main – and sometimes only – voice of the party since its creation. The political achievements were largely determined by his charisma and visibility. This dependence upon the leader facilitated a non-transparent management of the party in fulfilling its functions, including here the candidate selection process. It was quite rare for the public to have access to opinions and views coming from other party elites. Under these circumstances, the interview conducted with Mr. Tudor Barbu, the Vice-President of the PP-DD and Member of the Romanian Senate, is a rich source of information. It provides insights into the internal life of the party and sheds light on less discussed aspects, such as party origins, internal ideological debates, and adaptation strategies.

**On Party Origins and Ideology**

Building heavily upon the existing gap between citizens, on the one hand, and political elites and institutions, on the other hand, the PP-DD has always claimed to represent the former. In doing so, it has constantly emphasized the typical populist dichotomy of ‘us vs. them’ and has extensively promoted the involvement of citizens in a broad range of political, economic, social, and judiciary matters. Both features are clearly outlined in the manifesto used during the electoral campaign and in almost every public discourse. Consistent with this approach, Mr. Barbu presents the creation of the party as the result of popular will and participation. The PP-DD’s roots date back to a TV show hosted by Mr. Barbu at OTV, where he gathered a very high number of signatures (more than 5% of the electorate) to support the emergence of a social