

Romania: the centre-right takes power

Kamil Całus

On 4 November, the Romanian parliament voted by 240 deputies (of 233 required) to adopt a vote of confidence in a new government headed by Ludovic Orban, the leader of the centre-right National-Liberal Party (PNL) which had previously been in opposition. Orban's cabinet was supported by all the centrist and centre-right parliamentary groups, although they have not formally formed a coalition. The formation of the government was supported by representatives of the Save Romania Union (USR) and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE), as well as members of the national minorities among others. The vote was boycotted by the Social Democrats (PSD), led by the previous Prime Minister Viorica Dăncila, and the centre-left Pro Romania party of Victor Ponta. Despite this, several deputies from these groups supported the vote of confidence, which determined the success of the vote.

Commentary

- The appointment of the cabinet ends the political crisis which has been underway since 26 August, after the collapse of the PSD-ALDE coalition. However, it does not mean that the political scene has been stabilised. The National-Liberal Party, which according to polls may become the largest force in parliament after the elections, will undoubtedly come under constant attack from both the Social Democrats and the USR, which is competing for the centre-right vote with the PNL, and is winning increasing support. This party openly refused to participate in the new government, so that it would have the freedom to criticise its rival during the upcoming election campaign.
- The policy of Orban's cabinet is largely conservative, and will focus on the upcoming parliamentary elections, scheduled for the end of 2020. The new government will *de facto* be technocratic by nature. For this reason, it will only contain 18 members (compared to the previous 28), and its programme is very limited. The new cabinet's priorities will include amending the budget law, to ensure the liquidity of pensions and salaries in the public sector, and drawing up a draft budget for next year. In the slightly longer term, the government will also try to start the process of repairing the damage done to the Romanian judiciary by the reforms which the centre-left recently introduced, and which drew sharp criticism from Romania's Western partners and the European Commission.
- Although we should not expect significant changes to Romania's foreign policy (the post of foreign minister has been assumed by the presidential adviser and experienced diplomat Bogdan Aurescu), the national liberals' assumption of power (who have

criticised the controversial judicial reforms implemented by the PSD) will probably lead to a thaw in relations between Bucharest and the European Commission. One of the key tasks facing the new government will be to select Romania's candidate for the post of European commissioner for transport. The four applications submitted so far (formally and informally) by Dăncila's Social Democratic cabinet were received negatively by the EC. Prime Minister Orban is likely to propose one of his party colleagues for the post: either Siegfried Mureşan (an MEP and Vice-President of the European People's Party [EPP]) or Adina-Ioana Vălean (chairwoman of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy in the European Parliament). Given that the EC President Ursula von der Leyen has attached great importance to having a woman fill this post, Vălean's candidacy seems more likely.