

Big business candidate wins Romanian presidential elections

Andrei Tudora, Tina Zamfir
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The Romanian Social Democratic government is in political crisis following the decisive defeat of premier Victor Ponta in the second round of the presidential elections by the conservative candidate Klaus Iohannis.

Ponta was widely tipped as a possible successor to outgoing President Traian Basescu, having finished the first round with a 10 percent lead over Iohannis. According to opinion polls prior to the runoff, Ponta was the clear favorite. Final results gave Iohannis 54,5 percent, with Ponta getting 45,5 percent of the votes. At the November 16 runoff, turnout was 64 percent with more people showing up to vote than in the first round. Ponta lost the vote in traditional social democratic strongholds and in the major cities, including the capital Bucharest, as well as Constanta and Iasi.

The clear rebuff that Ponta received at the polls represents a rejection of the policies he has pursued in the last two years. Installed in 2012, in the wake of a political crisis created by mass anti-austerity protests, the Social Democratic-led government stands out as one of the most right-wing and viciously anti-working class administrations in the last 25 years.

With the close cooperation of the unions, Ponta became the champion of the austerity program of the EU and the IMF, overseeing mass layoffs and wage freezes in the public sector, privatizations of state companies and the systematic destruction of the remnants of the welfare state, including the privatization of the country's health system.

With the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis and the NATO encirclement of Russia, Ponta became an ardent proponent of the transformation of Romania into a militarized outpost of NATO and a center for further provocations against Russia, sparing no expense in the process. His presidential campaign was used to further increase tensions in the region, encouraging the former

Soviet republic of Moldova to speed up its European integration and vowing to become the president of a Greater Romania by 2018, by absorbing Moldova.

An immediate result of Romanian and EU intervention in Moldova has been the worsening of relations with the breakaway territory of Transnistria, which is supported by Russia. Transnistrian leader Evgheni Sevciuk was attacked earlier this month at Chisinau airport while attempting to board a flight to Moscow. Sevciuk's bodyguards were detained by the assailants and handed over to Moldovan police, who also subjected his car to a "search for weapons". The attack was claimed by the National Liberal Party of Moldova.

The essentially undemocratic character of the bourgeois election process was clearly evidenced by the virtual identity of the competing election platforms and by the complete disenfranchisement of the vast majority of the population.

Klaus the president elect, while attempting to pose as a nonaligned technocrat in the election campaign, openly represents the interests of big business and imperialism. Like the outgoing president Basescu, he is connected to European conservatives, and received the backing of Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel during the election campaign.

The 55-year-old Iohannis, a Transylvanian of German origin, began his political career in the 1990s, as a member of the right-wing Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania (FDGR). From 2000 onwards, he served as mayor of the city of Sibiu. The FDGR's close relations with the pro-market National Liberal Party prompted the liberals to back Iohannis for the post of premier in 2009, cultivating his image as a technocrat and outsider in Bucharest politics. His bid was at the time rejected by President Basescu.

In February 2013, Iohannis was invited to join the National Liberal Party, which was at the time the junior partner of the Social Democrats in government. He was quickly elevated to the leadership of the party, becoming its president in June 2014. By then the Liberals were in opposition, and Iohannis led the party into an alliance with the conservative Liberal Democratic Party of former Prime Minister Emil Boc.

The two parties are set to merge in the coming period. Iohannis has already positioned himself as a staunch representative of the Romanian ruling class. Speaking of the “optimal position” occupied by Romania as a result of the military encirclement of Russia, his electoral program calls for an even greater US presence in Eastern Europe, “in the spirit of article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty”, and for the increasing militarization of the country.

According to Iohannis, “The concentration of forces in the Baltic states and Poland is important, but in the new context, just as important is an increase of military presence in Romania and Bulgaria”, in order to “create an equilibrium between the Northern and Southern flanks in Eastern Europe”.

Romania will also increase its military spending, modernize the country’s armaments industry and increase the role of the secret services. This would, the future Romanian president argues, transform Romania into an “important landmark on the world geopolitical map, by becoming a provider of security on the regional field and consolidating its role as an operational basis for the main allies, including within the context of the antimissile defense system of the US, pending its integration into the NATO system.”

The new president will also step up the provocations concerning Moldova, vowing to gather all the factions of the bourgeoisie into a “national consensus”, to push for the European integration of Moldova. Highlighting the pernicious role that the EU is playing in stoking regional antagonisms, Iohannis says that counterpoising “reunification” and “[European] integration” is “faulty and useless”, the two being part of the same process.



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