

## WHAT COMES NEXT? A Candidate Perspective on the EP Policy Priorities until 2019

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**Abstract:** *Promises during electoral campaigns have been the focus of an extensive body of literature. So far, the candidates' perceptions prior to the moment of policy formulation received little attention. To partly address this problem, this article analyses the priorities of the European legislature for the 2014-2019 legislative term through the eyes of Romanian candidates in the 2014 European elections. The empirical evidence comes from a survey conducted during the electoral campaign (April-May) among candidates from 14 out of 15 competing parties. The results indicate little agreement about the perception of problems with which the EP will confront in the near future. Although one third of the candidates identified economic issues as central, qualitative insights into candidates' answers reveal different meanings attached to economy. Furthermore, important differences of policy perspectives are observable when looking at party affiliation, list position, and age.*

**Keywords:** *European elections, candidates, perceptions, policy priorities, European Parliament*

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### Introduction

Electoral campaigns are the ideal setting in which political parties and candidates make promises to maximize the likelihood of gaining access to public office. The role of election pledges is important and has been extensively investigated in relation to voting behaviour, ideological distance, coalition formation, and government policies (Budge and Laver 1986; Thomson 2001; Bara 2005; Mansergh and Thomson 2007; Artes and Bustos 2008; Louwse 2011). Analyses of policy proposals referred to manifestos, programs, or discourses produced by institutional (political parties) or individual (candidates) competitors around elections and sought to identify issues related to formulation, content, and further implementation. In this sense, the literature dealing with electoral campaigns looked at policies and, so far, little attention has been paid to opinions of the candidates regarding the environment in which they will act in case of successful election.

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This article takes a step back from the analysis of elections pledges and looks at perceptions prior to the moment of policy formulation. More specifically, it analyses the opinions of candidates regarding the priorities of the legislature for the following term in office. Such opinions are very relevant for the process of policy formulation and political representation. When candidates have a clear idea about the salient issues on the parliamentary agenda, they can better understand and fulfil expectations and may behave in a way consistent with institutional priorities. The study uses data from a candidate survey conducted in April-May 2014 (during the electoral campaign) among Romanian candidates for the European elections. The choice to study the perceptions of the priorities of the European Parliament (EP) was informed by its great transformations following the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty (Craig 2010; Piris 2010; Wallace, Pollack, and Young 2010; Horspool and Humphreys 2012). Having increased in importance among the European Union (EU) institutions, the EP is still adapting to its new position and thus defining its directions of action. Romania was selected because the European elections could be seen as a rehearsal for the presidential elections in the fall (Soare 2014) and candidates were likely to invest effort in this electoral campaign.

This study is empirical exploratory and aims to identify the topics perceived by Romanian candidates as highly important for the EP during the 2014-2019 legislative term. In doing so, it describes and analyses the similarities (with focus on categories) and differences between the perceptions of the candidates who answered a web survey during the electoral campaign. While the sample of respondents is non-probabilistic and not representative, almost all competing political parties have two or more candidates who answered the questionnaire. Their answers are informative and illustrate the complexity and diversity of topics from the European agenda. All these are presented in the body of the article using either descriptive statistics (in the form of frequencies and cross-tabulations) or qualitative insights.

The first section briefly discusses the background of the European elections in Romania. It describes the most recent political developments at national level and presents a profile of the competing political parties. The second section includes details about the web survey and respondent profiles. The third section presents the perspectives of candidates towards the most important problems in the 2014-2019 legislative term with an emphasis on the distribution of opinions across thematic categories. It also investigates how opinions differ according to type of party (parliamentary vs. extra-parliamentary), position on the list, and age. The conclusions summarize the main observations and discuss directions for further research.

### **The Road to the 2014 European Elections in Romania**

Since the 2007 accession, Romanian voters were called three times to the polls to elect their representatives in the EP. Organized for the first time in November 2007, the European elections offered a term in office of one year and a half to 35 candidates. June 2009 was the first time when Romania voted at the same time together with the other Member States and 33 candidates became Members of the EP (MEP) for a full term in office of five years. In the 2014 elections candidates belonging to 15 political parties and eight independent candidates competed for 32 seats. Apart from the continuous decrease of seats, these elections had two

more similarities. First, a limited number of parties succeeded in gaining enough support to pass the electoral threshold.<sup>1</sup> Similarly to the national legislative elections, only a handful of parties succeeded in having their candidates elected. Second, each election marked the success of one independent candidate. Although their presence in the EP is important, independent candidates are not included in this analysis. The reason for this decision is the comparability: candidates running under the label of one party may have the party line as point of reference for their opinions; such a line does not exist for independent candidates.

The 2012-2014 period has been characterized by a series of political changes that shaped the competition in the European elections. The origins of these changes can be traced back to February 2011 when the Social Democrat Party (PSD), the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Conservative Party (PC) decided to form a political alliance (Social Liberal Union, USL). Positioned in opposition, these parties occupied the first (PSD in alliance with PC) and third position in the 2008 legislative elections. Consequently, the USL meant that two of the three largest parties in the country joined forces and formed a strong opposition (i.e. parliamentary majority) against a minority government led by the Democrat Liberal Party (PDL). This situation produced the first effects in the spring of 2012 when, following two votes of no confidence, the PDL government stepped down from office and the USL received the task of forming a caretaker government until the 2012 legislative elections in winter.

An institutional conflict emerged between the USL government and the country president<sup>2</sup> resulting in an impeachment procedure voted by the parliamentary majority. The referendum organized in July 2012 to validate the impeachment was not valid and thus the president returned to office, continuing the hectic cohabitation process (Gherghina and Miscoiu 2013). In the national legislative elections the USL gained 60% of the votes (the equivalent of almost 70% of the seats in Parliament), while the PDL ran in an electoral alliance with the Civic Force (FC) and Christian Democratic National Peasants Party (PNTCD) and got almost 17% of the votes. The newly formed People's Party Dan Diaconescu came in third, while the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) was the last political competitor to gain parliamentary representation. Following the poor result in these elections, changes were necessary in the PDL and two factions emerged: one loyal to the party president and another favoured by the country president. The latter lost the PDL internal elections in March 2013, left and formed its own party - People's Movement Party (PMP). In brief, the formation of the PMP brought a new competitor on the political scene for the European elections.

The departure of the PNL from the USL and from the coalition government at the beginning of 2014 – as a result of unsettled disputes with the PSD – increased the

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<sup>1</sup> In Romania the European elections are organized on the basis of a closed list proportional representation system, similar with the one used for national legislative elections until 2008 (Chiru and Ciobanu 2009; Gherghina and Jigla 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The president of the country is a former PDL leader and a strong supporter of this party.

competition for European elections. Two other political parties – the FC and the PNTCD<sup>3</sup> – decided to run individually and thus enhanced the number of competitors in 2014. The radical right Greater Romania Party (PRM) failed to gain access to the Romanian Parliament in 2008 and 2012, but secured three seats in the EP 2009 elections and competed again in 2014. The populist PPDD, although it lost many members after its success in the 2012 national elections (Gherghina and Soare 2013), competed in its first European elections. The list of competitors was filled with several small parties such as the National Alliance of Agricultural Workers (ANA), Green Party (PV), Romanian Ecologist Party (PER), Party of Social Justice (PDS), Socialist Alternative Party (PAS), and New Republic Party (PNR).

Out of these 15 political parties only five gained parliamentary seats: the PSD (in alliance with the Conservative Party and National Union for the Progress of Romania), the PNL, the PDL the UDMR, and the PMP. While this is the same number of parties as in 2009, the difference lies in the composition. With 2.7% of the votes the PRM did not meet the electoral threshold (5% for political parties) and thus lost its EP representation. Instead, the first two candidates from the PMP list got elected; one of them returns to the EP since he was in office as a PDL representative in the 2009-2014 term. In fact, many of the Romanian MEPs from the previous legislative term got re-elected since the important parties decided to renominate them at top positions on the lists.

This concise presentation of recent developments and of political competitors in the 2014 elections gave an overview of the environment in which the candidates formulate their opinions. The following section provides insights about the candidate survey and shows basic features of the respondents such as party to which they belong, list position, and age.

### **The EP Candidate Survey**

A total number of 572 candidates competed for the 32 available seats. Initially, the number of candidates was higher because many of the 15 political parties compiled a list with 42 candidates. The lists of candidates belonging to some political parties (e.g. PRM, PV) were initially rejected by the Central Election Bureau due to procedural reasons. Following the court decision in favour of political parties, the Bureau had to accept their lists but only after problems (and some candidates) were removed; thus the number of candidates was slightly lower in some parties. Out of the total number of candidates, 274 candidates received an e-mail with the link to a 20 items questionnaire. Ideally, the web survey should have arrived to each candidate, but their e-mail addresses were not available. There was no systematic bias in the number of invitations sent per party: there were no parties to receive considerably fewer invitations to survey for its candidates than others.<sup>4</sup> Also, the

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<sup>3</sup> The PNTCD and PRM are in a peculiar situation because for each party there are two leaders who claim that they are the official representatives. This was the reason for which two lists were submitted to the Central Election Bureau by each party under the same label. The Bureau accepted the lists submitted by Aurelian Pavelescu (PNTCD) and Corneliu Vadim Tudor (PRM), rejecting the other two. Accordingly, the survey used in this analysis was sent only to the candidates from the lists accepted by the Bureau.

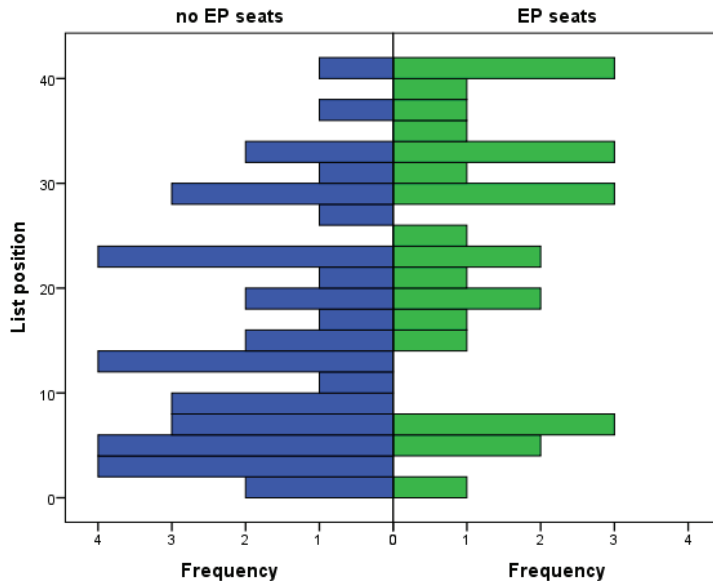
<sup>4</sup> The only major problem was with the PER where I could find only a handful of addresses, invitations were sent but no reply arrived; consequently the PER is not included in the analysis.

availability of addresses did not vary according to the position occupied on the list. Since the survey aimed to capture the attitudes and opinions of candidates during the electoral campaign, the data collection took place between 29 April and 20 May, i.e. several days after the official beginning of campaign and several days before the elections. A number of 68 candidates replied (a response rate of almost 25% from the number of invitations sent) distributed as follows: PNR (12), FC (10), PSD (10), PAS (7), PMP (6), PNL (5), UDMR (5), PV (3), PDL (2), PDS (2), PNTCD (2), PPDD (2), ANA (1) and PRM (1).

The survey included a mix of multiple choices – with single or multiple answers – and open questions ranging from issues related to membership and campaigning to ideological positioning and priorities envisaged for the next term in office. The last variable is central to this paper and is measured through the answers provided to the following open question: According to you, what are the most important two problems that the European Parliament has to solve in the following five years? As illustrated in the next section, the answers were diverse and could be clustered in several thematic categories. Before the analysis, a close look at the profile of respondents is useful to better understand their different background. Let us begin with the party affiliation and position on the list since these features may influence the attitudes of candidates towards the EP activity. For example, it may be argued that candidates who know that they will be elected (because they are top of the list in a party with large electoral support) may have different perspectives than those who stand little or no chance by being positioned at the end of the list in parties with little support. In this sense, the likelihood of being present in a legislature may influence the perception of institutional activity.

The distribution of respondents (Figure 1) indicates that the survey was taken by more candidates belonging to parties with no seats in the EP following the 2014 elections. The frequency on the horizontal axis is reported in numbers not percentages. This sample composition is normal because there were twice as many parties failing to get parliamentary representation than those passing the threshold (10 vs. 5). Consequently, the number of candidates was significantly higher – not proportionally higher due to the procedural problems mentioned in the previous section, but very close to being twice as many. However, the structure of survey respondents does not follow this 2 to 1 ratio among competitors. Thus, 28 candidates belonging to parties that gained access to the EP and 40 candidates belonging to political parties that failed to gain access took the survey.

**Figure 1: The Distribution of Respondents according to their Affiliation and List Position**



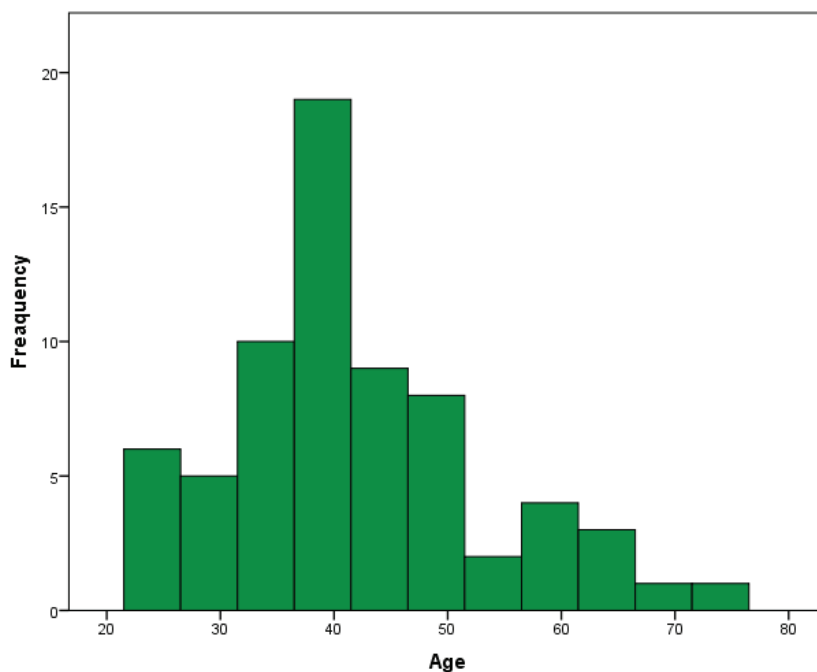
The distribution of candidates according to list position shows a good coverage of the survey. Thus, the majority of respondents is not clustered towards the beginning or the end of the list, with great variation between the parliamentary (EP as a point of reference) and non-parliamentary parties. Within the group of parliamentary parties, many respondents occupy positions 28 to 40 on the list. This is the largest group, compared with the respondents from positions 12-25 or 1 to 7. The distribution of candidates within the non-parliamentary parties is completely different with the highest number of respondents on positions 1-10. In their case, there were only few candidates from the end of the list who answered the survey.<sup>5</sup> To sum up, the major differences between the two categories of parties lie in the dispersion being more scattered for the parliamentary parties and mode with more respondents in the first positions for the extra-parliamentary parties.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of respondents according to their age in years at the time of election (25 May 2014). The frequency on the vertical axis is reported in numbers not percentages. The average age of the candidates who participated in the survey is 42 years with a standard deviation of 11 years. Consequently, two thirds of the survey respondents are between 31 and 53 years old. The youngest candidate taking the survey is

<sup>5</sup> Figure 2 indicates a lower density of respondents towards the end of the list (positions 30-42) for non-parliamentary parties compared to the parliamentary ones. This may have an exogenous cause: following the decision of the Central Election Bureau some parties had to withdraw candidates and thus their lists were shorter (e.g. 32-34 candidates).

24 years old, one year above the minimum age required by law for candidates, while the oldest candidates is 72 years old. Although not representative for the general population of candidates, the age distribution in the survey reflects what happened in reality. A close look at the age of candidates, available in the lists made public by the Central Election Bureau, indicates that most candidates for the 2014 EP elections were between 30 and 55 years old. There were few candidates in the 24-30 age category and in the over 65 category. The age category between 55 and 65 years old is underrepresented among the candidates who answered the questionnaire.

**Figure 2: The Distribution of Respondents according to Age**



All variables presented above will be used in the following section of this paper. The empirical results reveal a wealth of topics identified by candidates as priorities for the European legislature and relevant trends can be identified across parties, position on the list, and age categories.

### **Salient Issues: Similarities and Difference between Candidates**

The open question about the two main problems to be addressed by the EP in the following legislative term generated rich data. Only 49 respondents answered this question

(most of the others skipped it) out of which one did not indicate a second problem.<sup>6</sup> To provide an accurate overview of the major problems identified by the Romanian candidates, I cluster the answers into broader categories. These are created on the basis of empirical observations: if three problems mentioned by respondents have a common ground, they are merged into a category. This results in 10 thematic categories the last of which is “Other” and includes all problems that are either different than the ones in the previous nine categories or were not mentioned by more than two candidates (e.g. the environment issue has been mentioned by only two candidates).<sup>7</sup> Table 1 includes the percentages of respondents who mentioned problems belonging to one of the categories in their answers. More than one third of the candidates (35%) indicated economic issues as the first problem to be dealt with. A similar percentage of respondents indicated economic issues as a second problem. The second popular category is that of institutional reforms at the EU level: 17% of the surveyed candidates saw this as a primary problem, while 11% considered it to be secondary. The categories EU integration, democracy and foreign affairs are quite popular as first problems, but have lower percentages as second problems. Instead, social welfare is mentioned only as a second problem by several respondents without being seen as a first problem.

**Table 1: The Categories of Main Problems for the 2014-2019 Legislative Term**

Category	First problem (%)	Second problem (%)
Economic issues	35	36
Institutional reforms	17	11
EU integration	10	4
EU Democracy	8	6
Foreign Affairs	8	2
Minorities and migration	4	6
Security	4	8
National priorities	2	8
Welfare issues		6
Other	12	13
N	49	48

In light of these observations, economy and institutional reform appear to be the main concerns of Romanian candidates. By summing up the percentages of these two categories we notice that 52% of respondents place one of these problems in the first position, while

<sup>6</sup> The previous section presents the profile of all respondents to survey in order to provide an overview. The missing cases – those candidates who skipped the question about most important problems for the EU – are randomly distributed, there is no systematic bias; thus, the information provided before about their profile remains informative.

<sup>7</sup> This particular example of the environment topic is quite relevant in the context of a larger presence (three candidates) from the Green Party.



47% on the second position. Among the thematic categories only the EU integration as a first problem is getting closer to the percentages referring to institutional reform as second problem. It is somewhat surprising that migration and issues of ethnic minorities are seen as priorities by a limited percentage of Romanian candidates (4% and 6%) in the context of increased attention paid to processes of migration throughout the EU. At the same time, the percentage of candidates considering that Romanian priorities will be high on the European agenda are fairly limited (2 and 6%).

To see how different the categories indicated by candidates for the first and second problem are, Table 2 presents the results of a cross-tabulation for the most popular three categories for the first problem. The total percentage on the column is 100 and reflects what respondents who mentioned economy, institutional reform and EU integration as first problems consider being the second problem. For example, 37% of the candidates who refer to economy as the main problem to be addressed by the EP, mention also an economic issue as the second important problem. Security problems were seen as a second problem by 19% of the same respondents. Among those who said that institutional reforms will be the priority of the EU in the following five years 37% consider economy as a secondary problem; 25% of the same respondents indicated national priorities as highly important. Two partial conclusions can be drawn on the basis of these percentages. First, when describing the second problem for the EU, many respondents point in the direction of economy irrespective of their first choice. Second, most respondents chose a combination of problems. For example, none of those who mentioned the EU integration as first problem pointed in the same direction when defining the second problem.

**Table 2: Comparisons between First and Second Problems (percentages)**

Second problems	First problems		
	Economic issues	Institutional reforms	EU integration
Economic issues	37	37	20
Institutional reforms		13	
EU integration	13		
EU Democracy		13	
Foreign Affairs		12	
Minorities and migration	13		20
Security	19		20
National priorities		25	
Social welfare	6		
Other	12		40

The percentages in Table 3 illustrate how these problems differ according to party affiliation, list position and age of respondents. Similarly to the calculations in Table 2, the total per column adds up to 100 showing the situation within a category of identified

problems. To present the percentages in a comprehensible form I create categories with respect to list positions and age. The criterion used to create categories is empirical and refers to equal value intervals. There are 42 positions on the list and each of the three created categories includes 14, while age categories have similar number of years. The results reveal the existence of several important differences.

In terms of party affiliation, economy is seen as an important problem to an equal extent by parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties. Among the candidates identifying economy as a first problem, almost two thirds belong to the parliamentary parties; the situation is reversed when looking at economy as a second problem. Institutional reforms and EU integration are perceived as problems to a much higher extent by candidates of extra-parliamentary parties. Illustrative in this respect is that none of the respondents pointing in the direction of institutional reforms as a first problem – quite a few according to the percentages in Table 1 – belong to parliamentary parties.

**Table 3: Problem Perception according to Affiliation, Position and Age (percentages)**

	Economic issues		Institutional reforms		EU integration	
	First	Second	First	Second	First	Second
Parties with EP seats	65	35	0	20	20	50
Parties without EP seats	35	65	100	80	80	50
Positions 1-14	29	29	88	60	40	50
Positions 15-28	29	24	12	40	40	50
Positions 29-42	42	47	0	0	20	0
24-40 years	53	47	50	40	20	0
41-55 years	35	35	25	40	60	100
56-72 years	12	18	25	20	20	0

Differences in the perception of problems at EU level are noticeable also with respect to the position occupied on the list by candidates. Those positioned on lower positions (29-42) identify economy as a priority (both as a first and second problem) to a greater extent than the other candidates. In comparison, very few low positioned candidates see EU integration as being problematic and none refers to institutional reforms. The latter are of major concern for candidates at the top of the lists (positions 1-14), while EU integration worries to an equal extent top and mid-list candidates.

Candidates' opinions differ considerably according to age. Economic problems are considered a priority by those belonging to the 24-40 years category, while very few candidates belonging to the 56-72 years category mentioned it. The institutional reform has a high priority for the respondents belonging to the first two categories of age (in particular when speaking about this as a second identified problem). The question about the EU integration is more salient for the second age category. The low percentages of the last age category are partly the result of fewer respondents situated in this category (see Figure 2).

However, this difference in the number of respondents from each category should not be seen as the only explanation for the distribution because the second age category is smaller than the first and percentages are either equal or higher when referring to specific problems.

#### *How much Variation?*

The brief description and analysis of categories used by candidates to define the future problems at European level allowed us to draw two preliminary conclusions. One of them is that, there is little agreement regarding the policy priorities. The large amount of categories formed on the basis of candidates' answers is the proof for this lack of consensus. Another indicator is the different approach towards problems in the sense that candidates often combine categories (Table 2). Second, there are important differences between candidates according to their party affiliation, list positions and age (Table 3). Issue saliency differs both across these factors and across the order of problems, i.e. first or second issue.

This sub-section takes a step further and looks into the category of economic issues. As previously explained, this is the most popular among the Romanian candidates and the following lines aim to reveal the variation of approaches. Table 4 includes the answers that were included in the broader category of economic issues; this does not differentiate between first or second problem presented in the previous tables. As broad, general or vague as they sound, the large majority of entries are the answers as provided by candidates. For example, a candidate mentioned that EU economy is one important issue, another referred to economic stability, while others used terms like "investment" or "salaries" without any qualification or more specific terms attached. At the same time, a few respondents developed their ideas: for example, the candidate referring to internal market regulations provided extensive details regarding procedures to be adopted. Overall, there were rare cases when details were removed to maintain problems as simple and easy to understand as possible.

The large number of entries in Table 4 indicates the variation of opinions regarding the EU priorities in terms of economy. While some items were repeatedly mentioned – as indicated by the number in brackets – most problems are distinct and range from extremely broad aspects such as economic crisis, stability or investment to particular issues related to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) or policies related to value added tax (VAT). The order in the table tried to follow this logic and presents the issues in the order of their level of generality. Apart from the diversity of perspectives related to economic aspects it is also important to notice the magnitude of policy effect. The problems indicated in the first part of the table are thought for the entire Union, while others focus either on specific groups/sectors (e.g. youth problems, agriculture) or countries (e.g. developing countries, Eastern Europe).

**Table 4: The Specific Problems Mentioned by Romanian Candidates**

<b>Economic issues</b>	<b>Other</b>
Economic crisis (5)	Corruption (2)
EU economy	Credibility
Economic problems	Transparency
Economic stability	Cleavages in the EU (e.g. socio-economic)
Economic relaunch	Family
Economic growth in Eurozone	Protection of family as a union between different genders
Access to Eurozone for all Member States	Monument protection
Internal market regulations	Environment protection
Investment	Decrease the level of CO <sub>2</sub>
Fiscality	
Fiscal fraud strategies	
Development possibilities for poorer countries	
Legislative control of budget and finances	
Salaries	
Guaranteed minimum income	
Equitable allocation of EU funds (2)	
Change of allocation system and eligibility criteria for EU funds	
Unemployment (4)	
Free access on the EU job market	
Policies to increase job creation	
Jobs for youth	
Provisions regarding youth employment	
Budget control (cohesion and social funds)	
TTIP (2)	
Reindustrializing East European countries	
Agriculture	
The protection of traditional agriculture	
Change the VAT application system	
The removal of minimum VAT	

The “Other” category is also presented in Table 4 with two purposes: to illustrate the variation within the category and to give a sense of what problems were mentioned by candidates outside the 9 categories presented in Table 1. This residual category includes a wealth of topics ranging from corruption and transparency to family and environment protection. Similar to the category of economic issues, there is a mixture of general (e.g.

credibility) and specific (monument protection, family as mixed gender union) problems. In this sense, it is relevant to note the difference between the last two entries: two candidates considered environment protection as important but one of them referred in particular to the CO<sub>2</sub> problem.

The bottom line of this insight into the thematic categories is the broad variation of candidate policy perspectives. Although they mention problems that can be gathered under the same umbrella concept, their perspectives over policy priorities differ considerably. As illustrated in Table 4 there are only rare instances in which two or more candidates refer to the same problem.

### **Conclusion**

This article analysed the opinions of candidates regarding the priorities of the European legislature for the 2014-2019 term in office. Its purpose was exploratory and sought to reveal the existence of similarities and differences rather than to provide explanations. The empirical evidence came from a survey conducted during the campaign for the 2014 European elections among the Romanian candidates from 14 out of 15 competing parties. The study reveals little agreement about the perception of problems with which the EP will confront in the near future. The aggregation of answers in broader categories resulted in 10 different themes out of which one was labelled "Other" to include various topics that could not fit into any of the created categories. Although one third of the candidates identified economy as a focal point for the following period, insights into the exact answers of candidates show how different their understanding over economy is. In other words, the broad concept of economic issues gathers diverse perspectives over crisis, stability, investment, unemployment, agriculture, or TTIP.

Perspectives over priorities are also different when looking at the affiliation of candidates to parliamentary or non-parliamentary parties, list positions and age categories. An insight into opinions about economy, institutional reforms, and EU integration (i.e. the most popular thematic categories) indicate the existence of rare instances in which candidates have similar opinions. With the partial exception of economy and EU integration for candidates occupying different list positions, the differences are easily observable. In general, the differences appear to be the result of no discussions within the political parties regarding the policy directions once in office. Without a minimum effort of coordination, the Romanian parties lack a common vision regarding their role in the EP. This is why candidates belonging to the same party have divergent perspectives about the paths to be followed in the term in office. Under these circumstances, those who gained a parliamentary seat do not have similar expectations about their activities and this may influence their behaviour, e.g. low party unity.

This exploratory study bears empirical implications that go beyond the relatively narrow focus of a single-case study. Its main findings reveal the existence of variation in candidate attitudes towards policy priorities. These diverging opinions can represent both a dimension worth investigating in further candidate studies and an explanatory factor for legislative behaviour. The way in which candidates see the role of the institution to which they can

get elected may shape their later decisions and activities. Equally important, this variation can shed light on the extent to which electoral pledges can be pursued. Since legislators cannot make or influence policies working alone, they have to coordinate with others; to this end, the identification of a shared interest is crucial. The existence of a broad range of policy priorities prior to elections may raise obstacles against the fulfilment of promises after elections.

The limitations of my approach towards candidate perspectives over legislative priorities lie primarily in the number of observations and descriptive character of the manuscript. However, the wealth of data and main findings can represent valuable departure points for further research. One way to proceed is exploring the causes of observed differences in terms of policy perspectives. The reasons behind such a variation can be political (e.g. experience in public office, length of party membership, position in the party), ideological (e.g. left-right position), or personal features (e.g. occupation/field of activity). In this sense, all variables presented in this paper (Tables 2 and 3) can be tested as valid explanations. Along the same lines, a qualitative enquiry may be appropriate to identify the understanding of candidates when referring to the EU in general and the EP in particular. Another possibility to build on these different perspectives is to compare them with the ideas expressed in the electoral manifestos. This will allow the identification of consistent policy opinions between candidates and the parties for which they competed.

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