

The Formation and Functioning of Cabinets  
and Coalition Governments in Romania.  
Defense and Foreign Affairs Portfolios and  
Policies  
(1992 – 2020)

PhD Thesis  
Summary

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## Content and scientific relevance

Democratic political life is unthinkable today in the absence of coalitions. In fact, coalition building is a phenomenon inherent in human society, being, on the one hand, directly linked to the diversity of values, options, ideas, behaviors and interests, and on the other hand to the need for unity of action, cohesion and solidarity in specific contexts. Coalitions are based on a pact, an agreement, an understanding between individuals or groups, an alignment of interests and actions for a common cause. Coalitions can be formed in all areas of social life, at all levels and with different stakes. However, this thesis focuses only on a particular type of coalitions specific to multiparty democratic political regimes - coalition governments. After decades of political science experience and research on multiparty democratic regimes, coalition governments are today seen as the "norm." The study of their entire life cycle and its stages – from who gets into the coalition, who gets what portfolios, how they negotiate internally and up to the coalition termination – is the subject of an extensive literature.

Today, coalition theory is a vast field of research within political science, with several decades of expertise accumulated since the post-War period. Started in an accelerated manner in the '60s and '70s, the study of coalitions and coalition governments focused in its first phase on Western European democracies, which provided a diversity of examples and experiences. By the beginning of the '90s, there was already a rich literature on coalition governments. Prior to the fall of communism, coalition theory as a sub-field of research had already made significant progress through the case-studies offered by Western Europe. In 1990, Michael Laver and Norman Schofield's seminal work on multiparty governments and coalition politics in Europe (*Multiparty Government. The Politics of Coalition in Europe*), which remains a research benchmark to this day, was beginning to fill the previous gap in the coalition studies (Laver & Schofield, 1991, p. v). At the same time, Ian Budge and Hans Keman published another landmark study on coalition formation and functioning in 20 democracies (*Parties and Democracies. Coalition Formation and Government Functioning in Twenty States*). Their study included both countries in Western Europe and states outside the continent. (Budge & Keman, 1990, p. 1)

After the fall of communism and especially after the end of the democratic transition for the former communist countries, the literature, which had previously been focused on Western Europe, was faced with the challenge of including in the research an entire completely unexplored

geographical area. The theories developed over many decades of studying Western coalitions were about to be tested, validated or extended by research on Central and Eastern European states, with their political, social and historical particularities. Especially in recent years, remarkable progress has been made in studying coalition governments in Central and Eastern Europe, including Romania (Stefan, 2019) (Anghel & Thurk, 2019). Former communist countries started to be gradually included, with more data, in comparative studies. (Bergman, Ilonszki, & Muller, Coalition Governance in Central Eastern Europe, 2019)

Apart from the geographical expansion of coalition theory, recent decades have also brought an evolution in terms of content and research focus. If early studies on the formation and functioning of coalition governments were concerned with a "quantitative" dimension, to predict "who gets in" a coalition government, in a second stage the scholars' attention turned to a "qualitative" dimension. In other words, the focus has shifted from what parties join the coalition government and what they get to studying the relevance of different portfolios and the explanations for it. Since the 2000s, Warwick and Druckman have expanded on previous research by studying the importance of different ministries to coalition parties. They proposed models for measuring what the literature calls *portfolio salience*, previously considered a "missing piece" in the study of European parliamentary democracies. (Druckman & Warwick, 2005, p. 19)

Overall, the foreign affairs and defense portfolios had received marginal attention at best. In 2020, researchers Kai Oppermann and Klaus Brummer found that almost no research specifically investigated the reasons behind the allocation of the foreign affairs portfolio. (Oppermann & Brummer, 2020)

Despite the "prestige" (Druckman & Roberts, 2008) the ministries of defense and foreign affairs have enjoyed in Central and Eastern Europe (Bergman, Ilonszki, & Muller, 2019, p. 37), especially in the context of their efforts towards NATO and EU integration, systematic research on these portfolios has been limited so far. While there has been lately an increased interest in the foreign affairs portfolio, the defense portfolio remains largely under-researched.

At the same time, the scholarship on coalitions has shifted its emphasis from understanding the formation and termination of coalition governments to analyzing their entire life cycle, including how they govern, the impact of the internal decision-making process on public policies and their implementation. In 2008, Kaare Stroom, Wolfgang Muller, and Torbjorn Bergman edited a comprehensive volume (*Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining. The Democratic Life Cycle in*

*Western Europe*), which systematically covers all stages of the coalitions' lifecycle (Stroom, Muller, & Bergman, 2008).

Amid growing interest in analyzing portfolio salience and preferences of political parties in coalitions, as well as how coalitions govern, coalition theory has found itself in a point of intersection with international relations, previously not considered. Recent studies expanded the focus on understanding the impact of coalition politics on foreign policy and security. Despite the assertion that politics "stops at the water's edge" – an American metaphor underlining a consensual and bipartisan approach to foreign policy – domestic politics and the internal dynamic of coalition governments can have a direct impact on the formulation and implementation of foreign and defense policy. Studying the impact of coalition ideology, partisan structure and internal competition on foreign policy and security is one of the newest research trends.

While the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy comes with a long research tradition, approaching it through the lens of coalitions and coalition governments is relatively new. Today, coalition foreign policy remains an under-research field. (Oktay, 2022, p. 15)

When attempting to move into the territory of political science and comparative politics, foreign policy analysis was rather limited to exploring the effects of coalition governments as opposed to the effects of one-party governments. Studying the impact of coalition foreign policy on the behavior of a state in the international arena has long been exceptional and limited. Hagan (Hagan, Everts, Haruhiro, & Stempel, 2001), Kaarbo (Kaarbo, 2013), Beasley (Beasley & Kaarbo, 2014) and in 2022 Oktay (Oktay, 2022) expanded the main theoretical milestones of this new research direction.

Initially, there were two concurrent views on coalitions in foreign policy: one regarded them as dysfunctional, prone to slow decision-making or deadlock, and therefore ineffective due to the large number of actors involved; the other regarded them as more effective, due to the need to align different perspectives. Juliet Kaarbo was the one who went beyond this paradigm and argued coalitions tend to be more "extreme" in foreign policy, that is, on the pacifist-aggressive axis they are situated towards one of the two extremes and not towards the center.

In particular, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the decisions of different states to participate in or withdraw from international coalitions have highlighted the importance of coalitions in formulating foreign policy and provided new case studies for a comparative approach

to coalition foreign policy. However, the need to deepen the research continues to be strong, as "political party factors influencing foreign policy remain under-theorized." (Oktaý, 2022, p. 28)

Despite this vast literature and the progress made, as indicated earlier, there are still at least three areas insufficiently covered and explored. One is geographical, given the disproportion between research dedicated to Western Europe, and Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Romania is less covered than other former communist states. In terms of coalition formation and life cycle, Romania has been included in comparative studies and case studies (especially through the contributions of Laurentia Stefan and Veronica Anghel). Nevertheless, Romania is missing from the relevant research on the coalition foreign policy. For example, Sibel Oktaý's latest contribution in the field analyzes the impact of coalitions on foreign policy decisions in most Central and Eastern European states, with semi-presidential systems, but does not include Romania. Romania's absence from such research presents the opportunity to contribute to closing a research gap and makes the topic of this dissertation a premiere.

The second area insufficiently covered is portfolio allocation and portfolio salience, and why political parties prefer certain portfolios over others, in particular foreign affairs and defense portfolios.

This topic is directly related to the third less explored area, namely coalition foreign policy. Existing scholarship has addressed the difference between one-party and coalition governments, tried to determine whether coalition governments are more extreme or moderate in terms of international relations, and analyzed how coalition size, parliamentary strength or ideological identity influenced foreign policy decisions. However, studies in this field remain limited, due to the long separation between in political science and international relations. (Raunio & Wagner, 2020)

Against this background, the current dissertation is a unique case study on coalition governments in Romania during 1992-2020, at the intersection of all the research areas mentioned above. Coalitions in general, and those in Romania in particular, represent a real "puzzle", presenting numerous opportunities and challenges related to the particularity, historical context and specificity of the institutional framework.

More than 30 years have passed since Romania resumed its democratic experience and with it the experience of coalition cabinets. In these decades, governing coalitions have become a current reality of Romanian politics, and the internal dynamics of portfolio distribution have come

to the attention of the public and researchers alike. During this period, the great national objectives were intrinsically linked to foreign and defense policy. Romania's accession to NATO and the European Union, the Strategic Partnership with the United States were national objectives, embraced by all political parties, which put the defense and foreign affairs portfolios at the forefront.

In this paper I analyzed the allocation of foreign affairs and defense portfolios in coalition governments in post-communist Romania, between 1992 and 2020, as well as what motivated political parties in choosing these portfolios. I covered 22 coalition cabinets, under 12 Prime ministers and 4 Presidents, including minority coalition governments and excluding one-party or non-partisan formulas.

I also studied how coalition politics impacted foreign and defense policy and, reciprocally, how developments in these areas affected preferences in the distribution of the ministries.

### **Research objectives, questions, and hypothesis**

Against this background, I have defined the objectives of the research as follows:

- Identifying the tendencies and preferences of political parties in allocating foreign affairs and defense portfolios in coalition governments in post-communist Romania, during 1992-2020 and understanding the parties' motivations in choosing these portfolios.
- Studying how coalition politics was reflected in foreign and defense policy and, reciprocally, the impact foreign policy and defense objectives had on portfolio allocation.

Research questions:

- What political parties prefer defense and foreign affairs portfolios in coalition governments?
- What motivates coalition parties to request these portfolios?
- How has the profile of defense and foreign affairs ministers evolved over time?
- How have intra-coalition or intra-executive conflicts been reflected in contested foreign policy or defense proposals?
- How has Romania's foreign and defense policy evolved after the EU accession?

To formulate the research hypothesis, I resorted to the classical framework offered by Stephen Van Evera, in the volume *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Thus, the research hypothesis defines the "relationship between two phenomena", respectively between independent variables and dependent variables. Independent variables describe the phenomenon causing a hypothesis, while dependent variables describe the phenomenon caused. The relationship between independent and dependent variables is not always simple and straightforward. First, the causal phenomenon that a hypothesis aims to explain or test requires, in some situations, putting it into a particular context. Thus, "antecedent conditions" describe "a phenomenon whose presence activates or magnifies the action of a causal law or hypothesis." (Evera S. v., 1997, p. 9-10). Also, a number of other variables may intervene in formulating a hypothesis. The "intervening variable" is generated by an independent variable and causes the dependent variable, while a "condition variable" frames the antecedent conditions. (Evera, 1997, pg. 10-11)

Based on this theoretical framework I summarized the research hypothesis below: Against the background of Romania's constitutional architecture and proportional representation system, which favors the formation of coalitions, the structure of the coalition government and the political affiliation of the president and the coalition government determine the allocation of foreign affairs and defense portfolios, as well as foreign policy and defense proposals leading to intra-coalition or intra-executive conflict.

I have explained this hypothesis below as follows, including in its graphical representation.

#### Antecedent conditions

- Romania's constitutional architecture, which includes a semi-presidential republic, president with foreign policy and defense constitutional powers, executive branch with a president and a prime minister, other bodies such as the Supreme Council for Country Defense
- Proportional representation favoring coalition governments

#### Independent variables

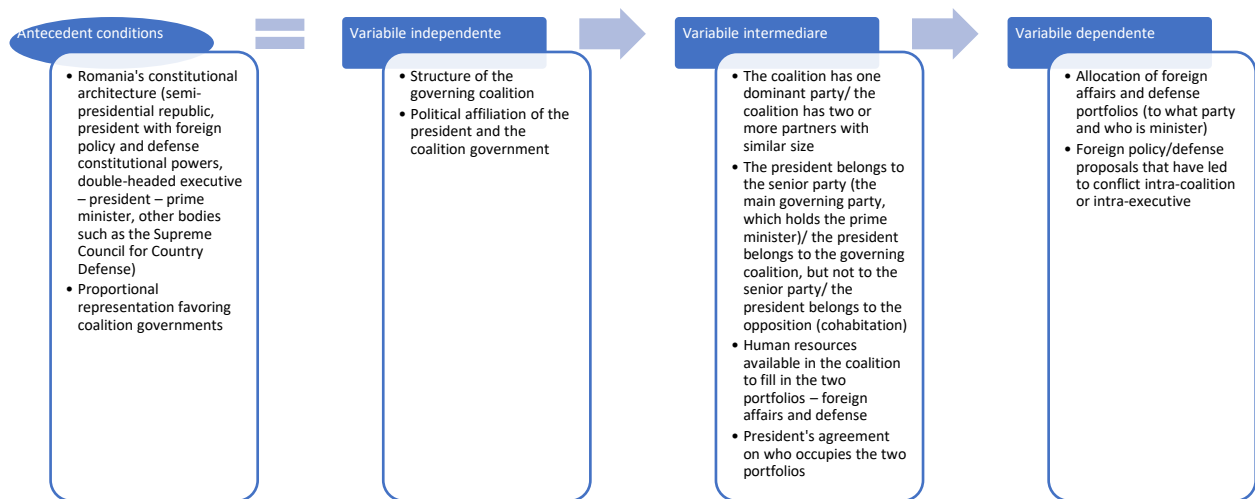
- Structure of the governing coalition
- Political affiliation of the president and the coalition government

## Intervening variables

- The coalition has one dominant party/ the coalition has two or more partners with similar size
- The president belongs to the senior party (the main governing party, which holds the prime minister)/ the president belongs to the governing coalition, but not to the senior party/ the president belongs to the opposition (cohabitation)
- Human resources available in the coalition to fill in the two portfolios – foreign affairs and defense
- President's agreement on who occupies the two portfolios.

## Dependent variables

- Allocation of foreign affairs and defense portfolios (to what party and who is minister)
- Foreign policy/defense proposals that have led to conflict intra-coalition or intra-executive





## Methodological aspects

From a methodological perspective, this thesis is based on qualitative research, it is a historical case study. It covers coalition cabinets from the beginning of the first 4-year electoral cycle organized under the new Constitution until the end of the most recent complete electoral cycle, namely the period 1992-2020. According to the existing literature, a governing coalition includes at least two parties, regardless of their size. One-party and non-partisan ("technocratic") cabinets are not included in this study. (Muller, Bergman, & Strom, 2010, p. 6)

Also, the notion of "coalition" does not imply a "majority". The existence of a coalition refers to the number of parties (two or more) forming either a majority coalition cabinet or a minority coalition cabinet.

As far as the analyzed portfolios are concerned, I included in the study only the national defense and foreign affairs portfolios, namely the Ministry of National Defense (MApN) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE). I did not include other foreign policy related junior ministers, appointed during the past decades.

In order to define a new cabinet, I follow the criteria established by the collation theory literature: elections, a change of prime minister, a change in the political structure of the government (Muller, Bergman, & Strom, 2010, p. 6), to which I added a fourth, following the approach proposed by Laurentiu Stefan: approval by a vote of confidence in the Parliament.

In addressing portfolio allocation, I consider all political parties in a coalition distinctly, regardless of size and how they won their parliamentary seats – through an alliance or alone. (Huiu, 2021, pg. 211-212)

As research methods, I have resorted to *desk research*, to collecting and processing data and facts relevant to the case, including the political and historical context that accompanied the formation and breaking of coalition governments in Romania. A second type of documentation involved deepening the study of international relations literature to identify relevant scholarship complementary to coalition theory, bibliographic sources explaining portfolio allocation and portfolio salience, and examining the relationship between coalition politics and coalition foreign policy.

In addition to data from my own research, I also used the combined set of databases for Western, Central and Eastern Europe, available on The *Representative Democracy Data Archive* (<https://repdem.org>).

The main original element of this paper from a methodological standpoint is represented by the research interviews. This qualitative method, inside of a post-positivist approach, serves the research objectives and can provide access to information, nuances and understanding otherwise unavailable from a merely quantitative approach.

The in-depth research interviews were conducted with and focused on the experience of former foreign affairs and defense ministers, prime-ministers and political leaders in Romania, who participated in coalition governments formation, bargaining and portfolio allocation. They represent the entire political spectrum and all cycles of government.

The interviews were semi-structured, with announced topics and open questions. The interviews are confidential, were conducted only for research purposes and are not to be made public.

## **Structure**

After an introductory chapter, Chapter II describes the methodological framework, including the use of the interview as a research method.

Chapter III is dedicated to literature review, covering the intersection between international relations and coalition theory. Thus, I start from the major theoretical directions in international relations, presenting key elements of realism and neorealism, liberalism, and constructivism, and shortly address foreign policy analysis as a field. I review some of the established theoretical contributions on how domestic politics matters in foreign policy formulation and the role of domestic factors. I then examine more recent theories on coalitions as a unity in foreign policy. Subsequently, I refer to the extremity of coalition foreign policy, as well as to the factors influencing coalition behavior in foreign and defense policy, including size of coalitions, their ideological homogeneity and their relationship with the parliamentary opposition. Such research directions go beyond the earlier theories that differentiated between one-party cabinets and coalition cabinets, and beyond those portraying coalitions in a "negative image" from the foreign policy standpoint.

This brings me to the intersection between coalition foreign policy and current debates about coalition types and portfolio allocation. Starting from the framework provided by coalition theory, I review the most widespread types of coalitions and the main theories on coalition formation and portfolio allocation. I then move on to the study of portfolio salience and, in particular, to the foreign affairs portfolio. In addition to coalition foreign policy, I also refer briefly to the role of political parties in foreign policy, as a new research approach.

I address separately the existing scholarship on coalition governments in post-communist Romanian and the contribution of Romanian researchers in the field. Finally, I review some literature on democratic wars and participation of democracies in armed conflicts.

Chapters IV and V deal with the examination of the research questions and each of the dependent variables. Thus, Chapter IV addresses the allocation of foreign and defense portfolios, from two perspectives: what parties receive these portfolios, and who are the ministers. This chapter also distinguishes the possible configurations of coalitions depending on their structure and the political affiliation of the president and prime minister, with consequences on the distribution of the foreign affairs and defense portfolios. The proposed classification differentiates the following types of situations: the president and prime minister belong to the same party which dominates the coalition; the president belongs to the coalition, but not to the main governing party that gave the prime minister; the president and prime minister belong to the same party, but this party does not dominate the coalition; cohabitation (the president and coalition government belong to opposing political camps).

Chapter V explores the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy, whether and how politics within coalitions has affected foreign policy decisions. This chapter includes the foreign/defense policy proposals that led to conflict within the coalition or within the executive and addresses the following research questions: how internal conflicts within the coalition or intra-executive were reflected in contested foreign policy or defense proposals and how the objectives related to Romania's accession to the European Union and NATO affected the preferences in portfolio allocation in coalitions. After describing the large political agreement on the major national foreign policy and defense objectives, regardless of the composition of the governing coalitions, Chapter V focuses on two exceptions. Thus, I present in more detail two case studies of contested foreign policies, which overlapped with internal political conflicts: the proposal to

withdraw Romanian troops from Iraq, advanced in 2006, and the proposal to move the Romanian Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018-2019.

Chapter VI is an analysis of developments in foreign and defense policy in the post-accession period, in the light of the studied variables. Finally, Chapter VII summarizes the main conclusions of the research and examines once again the validity of the hypothesis.

## **Conclusions**

The coalition governments in Romania followed on average the famous "proportionality law", i.e. they divided portfolios relatively proportionally to the weight of each party in the coalition. Data provided by the 22 coalition governments between 1992 and 2020 reveal a proportionality index similar to the European average. The distribution of portfolios in Romanian coalition governments generally reflected the parliamentary strength and contribution to the coalition of each party.

In post-communist Romania, there is no identifiable predictable pattern in the allocation of the foreign affairs and defense portfolios. Due to its image potential, the foreign affairs ministry was generally desired by political parties especially for electoral reasons, mostly during the first two post-communist decades. Especially before the EU accession, the foreign affairs portfolio was seen as a possible source of favorability and political power, as a veritable electoral "catalyst". This translated either into the desire of some top political leaders to become foreign affairs ministers, or into the rise of foreign ministers as popular politicians, who later moved to hold higher political offices. Several former foreign affairs ministers became party leaders or presidential candidates (Adrian Nastase, Mircea Geoana, Teodor Meleşcanu, Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu), after gaining popularity during their ministerial term, associated with the national interest rather than with the internal political struggles.

However, in practice none of the parties branded itself consistently by association with one of these two portfolios. Although it was desirable for any party, the allocation of foreign affairs portfolio, as well as defense portfolio, had to take into account a mix of factors: the weight of that party within the coalition, which determined or limited the bargaining capacity, the nominations it could make for these positions and especially the relationship with the president.

When the coalition formed around a dominant, almost majoritarian party, which gave both the prime minister and the president, the foreign affairs and defense ministries went to that party. Junior parties in coalitions obtained the foreign affairs ministry only under certain conditions, namely when their weight allowed them to negotiate or when they had political leaders or former ministers who requested these portfolios. The "critical" nature of the junior party, (the withdrawal of the critical junior party from the cabinet would have led to the loss of the majority), respectively a similar size of the senior partner and the second largest party, provided favorable conditions for the foreign affairs portfolio to be allocated to a junior party. However, the defense ministry was more often allocated to the most important governing party, in different coalition formulas.

When a junior party had a similar size to the senior party or the senior party did not dominate the coalition, the likelihood that the defense or foreign affairs portfolio would go to the junior party increased.

The allocation of foreign affairs and defense portfolios in coalition governments in Romania during 1992 - 2020 depended, therefore, on several factors: on the structure of the coalition, respectively on the size of coalition parties, on the agreement or even the will of the president and, last but not least, on the human resources parties had available. Thus, there is no general formula to predict who takes over foreign affairs or defense portfolios. However, several trends are identifiable, and some conclusions could be drawn.

When the president and prime minister belonged to the senior coalition party and this party had a significantly higher share in the coalition than the junior partners, the foreign affairs and defense portfolios were both distributed to this party (during 1992 – 1996 and 2000 – 2004, with Ion Iliescu president and PSD dominant governing party). This political configuration lacked any major tensions within the coalition and within the executive on defense and foreign policy issues.

In situations when coalition parties were similar in size or the senior party was not significantly larger than its junior partner or partners, the allocation of foreign affairs and defense portfolios was less predictable. The two portfolios were allocated either to the main party (after the 2004 elections, PNL initially held both ministries in Tariceanu 1 cabinet); or to the junior party (the case of the Democratic Party between 1996 and 2000, under the governments of Ciorbea, Vasile, Isarescu); or were divided (in the Boc 1 government, after the 2008 elections, PDL took over the foreign affairs portfolio, PSD the defense portfolio), without being able to establish an exact pattern. This was equally valid both when the president and prime minister belonged to the

same party (in the governments of Boc 3 and Ungureanu, with Traian Basescu as president) and when the president belonged to the coalition, but not to the senior party (CDR governments, with PNȚCD premier under Emil Constantinescu; Justice and Truth Alliance government after the 2004 elections, in which PNL had the prime minister and PD, President Basescu's party, was the junior partner). The absence of a pattern is explained also by differences in what portfolios parties prioritized and their human resources, in other words who they could nominate for the different ministerial positions.

In cases of cohabitation (under Presidents Traian Basescu and Klaus Iohannis) the senior party had greater bargaining freedom, in some instances giving away either the foreign affairs or the defense portfolio to a junior party (in the Grindeanu, Tudose and Dancila 1 governments, ALDE held the foreign affairs, PSD the defense) or even both portfolios (in the Ponta 1 government, PSD ceded the foreign affairs and defense to PNL), to the extent that the respective party wanted them and had suitable persons for those ministries.

Both the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have a distinct structure, and are well-organized and specialized systems. This limited the options for ministerial appointments, particularly at the foreign affairs ministry where the office holders had to meet at least some basic requirements, such as a level of knowledge, expertise or experience in foreign policy or a level of public recognition and prestige. Unlike other ministries where political support could be the only indispensable condition, coalition parties had to take into account other criteria when nominating foreign affairs ministers.

Overall, for defense and foreign affairs portfolios, coalition parties generally selected nominees from the party leadership or personalities from outside the parties with expertise in the system. In the defense area, political parties preferred to appoint ministers from the party leadership (PD Sorin Frunzăverde, Victor Babiuc, PNL Teodor Atanasiu, PDL Mihai Stanisoara), while the foreign affairs ministers were more diverse. The foreign affairs ministers came from three major sources: career diplomats (Teodor Meleşcanu, Lazăr Comănescu) or former ambassadors or employees of the foreign affairs ministry (Teodor Baconschi), people with experience in the system (Titus Corlatean); two, from party leaders (Petre Roman); three, independent personalities not belonging to the ministry or to the political parties, but having academic recognition and a notable public presence (Andrei Pleşu). Over time, these categories

came to be interconnected. Once in office, some former diplomats or public intellectuals embraced a political identity and became party leaders, while others remained independent.

Political parties generally considered the particular nature of the foreign affairs ministry and took into account at least some basic requirements, even if unwritten, when appointing ministers. Thus, none of the foreign ministers was appointed exclusively on political criteria and with no foreign affairs expertise or managerial experience.

The defense portfolio presents a distinct overall picture. As Romania transitioned to civilian control over the military, political parties appointed as defense ministers either top party leaders, such as party vice-presidents, or former ministers with previous governmental experience in other areas.

Last but not least, all the research interviews conducted showed the importance of an alignment between the president and the coalition parties when it came to appointing foreign affairs and defense ministers.

In all cases, the President has played a key role over time, and his agreement was a *sine qua-non* condition for appointment. Unlike Western European states with parliamentary systems, in Romania's case, the allocation of foreign affairs and defense portfolios cannot be separated from the Constitutional role and powers of the President in these areas. Thus, existing theories about coalition foreign policy or the functioning of coalition governments reach their limits, as the formulation of foreign and defense policy does not lie solely or primarily with the coalition government, but with the President.

The President – Prime Minister – Foreign Affairs Minister forms in Romania an institutional "triangle", in which the former has rather strategic and decision-making powers, and the latter tactical and implementation duties. When the three are politically aligned, the potential for conflict is minimal. In cases of cohabitation, however, or when the president and prime minister belong to different parties, even if they are part of the same coalition, there is more favorable ground for disputes in formulating foreign or defense policy proposals. In Romania, during the post-communist period, such disputes have been rather exceptions to the broad agreement that has characterized Romanian foreign policy and defense policy. However, when conflicts have arisen, they did so when the President and Prime Minister belonged to different parties.

Romania's accession to NATO and the European Union proved in time to have been a demarcation line both in terms of the salience of foreign affairs and defense portfolios, as well as

in terms of contested foreign policy or defense policy proposals. Especially when it came to the two major national objectives – Romania's accession to NATO and the European Union – the coalition parties and generally all the Romanian political parties found common ground and managed to align themselves, despite often fierce internal conflicts within coalition governments or between parties in power and opposition parties. In many instances, domestic politics really “stopped at the border” when it came to common national interests.

In principle, the coalitions in Romania were moderate from a foreign policy perspective, as they kept a foreign policy approach consistent in time, without extreme decisions. Defense and foreign policy has been constantly and consistently conducted in line with Romania’s major national objectives of achieving EU and NATO membership.

*Coalition politics* was not so obviously reflected in foreign policy - either in terms of major foreign policy directions, which enjoyed consensus, or in terms of particular policies. Very rarely have foreign policy and defense proposals been disputed between coalition parties or between the coalition government and the president.

In the rare cases when foreign policy proposals generated political conflict, this happened against the background of already existing political tensions between the president and the senior coalition party (under cohabitation) or when the president and the prime minister belonged to different coalition parties. I discussed in detail two situations of contested foreign policy proposals: the proposed withdrawal of Romanian troops from Iraq in 2006 and the move of the Romanian embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018-2019. In both cases, it was the senior coalition party that tried to *hijack* a foreign policy issue and used a foreign policy proposal to score domestic points or divert attention (*diversionary tactics*) from domestic weakness. However, even in these cases, the domestic politics – foreign policy relationship was not unidirectional. In each of the two situations there were external triggers, and several explanations were simultaneously valid. Neither proposal materialized.

The latest research on coalition foreign policy concludes that coalitions are generally more "extreme" in foreign policy, i.e. their policies can be placed closer to the extremes of the pacifist-aggressive axis (they are either more pacifist or more aggressive). At the same time, coalition foreign policy risks either to be *hijacked* by a junior party, or to be used to exchange political favors in coalition bargaining (*logrolling*) or to be used as a "diversion" to hide the coalition's internal weakness and divert attention from domestic issues.



However, understanding Romanian post-communist foreign policy does not necessarily fit this theoretical framework. The Romanian foreign and defense policy was moderate, neither excessively "pacifist" nor excessively "aggressive". Foreign and defense policy decisions were shaped by the national objectives of NATO and EU accession, and later by the NATO and the European Union membership, in a pragmatic and unitary approach. This was favored by the semi-presidential character of the republic, by the distribution of foreign policy and defense powers between the President on the one hand and the government through the Prime Minister and ministers on the other. Due to the semi-presidential system, with a central role given to the President, foreign and defense policy was less likely to be hijacked by single political actor or to be used effectively as a diversionary tactic in domestic politics. Romania's institutional architecture and the historical context rather favored broad agreement and even consensus on foreign policy.

When they emerged, tensions in foreign policy and defense did not originate so much from coalition politics, but from the conflict between the two poles of the executive branch, namely between the President and the Prime Minister, or the President and the senior coalition party.

On the other hand, however, the internal coalition politics affected the foreign and defense policy by decreasing over time the salience of foreign affairs and defense portfolios for political parties and by frequent changes of ministers.

Although declaratively foreign affairs and defense continue to matter to political parties, their interest in the two ministries decreased de facto after Romania's accession to NATO and the European Union. If in the first part of the three decades studied, the defense and foreign affairs ministries were among the most desired offices for coalition parties, gradually they lost their attractiveness. Especially after Romania became a NATO and EU member state, a large part of the former ministers and political leaders interviewed noted a type of "inertia" in foreign policy, as a result of belonging to collective decision-making mechanisms, and of lacking new major long-term national projects.

The decrease in political parties' interest in foreign affairs and defense portfolios occurred gradually, as preferences shifted to other areas and coalition parties prioritized ministries with higher access to resources and funding. According to the data from the research interviews, this phenomenon impacted the selection criteria for the two portfolios and resulted in "lowering standards". Thus, Romanian political parties have gradually become less concerned with attracting

experts in the field as party members and with their internal selection process for these portfolios. Instead, they started to favor or accept technocratic solutions, outside politics or appoint ministers from lower party levels, while party leadership focused on more attractive ministries.

Internal conflicts within coalitions led either to reshuffles, to changes in the political composition of the cabinet, or to the fall of governments at short intervals. They have had indirect repercussions on foreign affairs and defense, resulting in frequent ministerial changes, which in turn had an impact on efficiency and performance.

From 1992 until the EU accession in 2007, Romania had six foreign affairs ministers (Teodor Meleşcanu, Adrian Severin, Andrei Pleşu, Petre Roman, Mircea Geoană, Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu). From 2007 to 2020, foreign affairs ministers changed 13 times, with some returning to the office for short periods. Instability at the defense ministry is even more evident, especially after 2014. Between 2014 and 2019, the Minister of Defense changed no less than 7 times (Mircea Dusa, Mihnea Motoc, Gabriel Les in two different intervals, Adrian Țuțuianu, Mihai Fifor and Nicolae Ciucă).

The junior coalition parties did not use foreign and defense policy as leverage, nor did they try to hijack foreign policy issues or divert attention from domestic politics through contested foreign policy or defense proposals. Instead, tensions within coalitions have shortened cabinet lifetime, and at times cabinet survival was called into question immediately after taking office. This has created a political environment in which it was difficult to assume, let alone implement long-term projects.

All these conclusions only partially validate the research hypothesis, and rather nuance it, opening the way to new directions of research.

In allocating foreign affairs and defense portfolios, the structure of the coalition matters, as does the political affiliation of the president and of the coalition government. However, unless the president and prime minister belong to the senior party that dominates the coalition government – in which case the two portfolios belong to that party – there is no pattern that can predict the allocation of foreign affairs and defense portfolios. As I have shown, the allocation of these two portfolios depends on a mix of three elements that matter: the bargaining power of a coalition party resulting from the structure of the coalition, the relationship with the president as the president's agreement matters, and the human resources political parties have for those portfolios. The outcome of this mix, however, was different case by case.

Also, the second dependent variable – namely foreign policy/defense proposals that have led to conflict intra-coalition or intra-executive – did not depend on the structure of the coalition (with a dominant party or with similar size parties). When a coalition party generated such conflicts, the main factor was the conflict with the president.

Having in the background the national objectives of joining NATO and the European Union, which enjoyed the broad agreement of the political parties and the public opinion alike, the internal coalition politics and the major directions in foreign and defense policy mutually shaped each other. Therefore, it is difficult to assert only a one-way causal relation from domestic politics to foreign policy, let alone from *coalition politics* to *coalition foreign policy*. Domestic politics impacted foreign policy, but also foreign policy impacted domestic politics.

Likewise, while domestic coalition politics has not impacted or thwarted the major foreign policy options in post-communist Romania so far, this does not necessarily predict the absence of conflicts on foreign policy or defense matters within future coalition governments.

Although exceptional, the two cases of contested proposals I presented in this thesis are significant in indicating that foreign and defense policy can become a source of conflict either within the executive branch or within the coalition government, especially in the absence of large common national objectives.

These nuanced conclusions leave room for further study on coalition foreign policy and the behavior of coalition governments in international relations. One of the possible directions of further research is a comparative study including other former communist states, with semi-presidential regimes, in Central and Eastern Europe, to test whether Romania's example is typical for the region or particular. Such research would include studying the allocation of foreign affairs and defense portfolios in all these states and the possible trends or patterns. Another direction of research may be the inclusion of "junior ministers" with roles in or adjacent to foreign policy.

Through its broad and innovative approach within the theoretical niche linking coalition theory to international relations, this thesis offers a systematic study on Romania, whose conclusions can be added to existing comparative studies. In this way, Romania is represented within latest research in the field of coalition foreign policy and portfolio allocation.

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