

A War of Two Palaces: Semi-Presidential Government and Strategic Conflict

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*"And he, rebellious, seeks out the tempest
And once in tempest, as if he would discover peace"
Mikhail Lermontov, The Sail*

The Basescu-Tariceanu period (2005-2008) in recent Romanian politics was a tragic-comedy of classical proportions. The Social Democratic Party, successor to the previous Communist regime, lost power for the second time in the November-December 2004 elections. Expectations ran high for the new government, dominated by the right-center Truth-and-Justice Alliance. Unfortunately, the end result turned out to be vicious institutional conflict and stalemate. The purpose of this chapter is to identify certain systematic features, beyond personality and partisanship, that help explain why this occurred.

Traian Basescu, a former ship captain turned Democratic Party mayor of Bucharest, was an unlikely candidate for Romanian President, who narrowly won office in the second-round runoff. The Prime Minister he selected, Calin Popescu-Tariceanu of the National Liberal Party, was supported by a diverse parliamentary coalition somewhat unprepared for the responsibilities of governance. Basescu was brusque and self-righteous as a leader who pledged to be an activist, player-President on behalf of national reform. Tariceanu was hesitant and reactive as coalition manager, highly sensitive to personal criticism and incapable of transcending factional rivalries. Within months, the two national executives were engaged in a personal, partisan, rhetorical, but minimally ideological battle. Political optimism wilted under the torrent of mutual accusations and denunciations. President Basescu labeled the Romanian political class "slop on a window" (*Nine O'Clock* 2008), dominated by oligarchs who "channel political decisions to their own interests" (Serban 2007c). Prime Minister Tariceanu claimed that the President was in quest of single-person rule reminis-

cent of the former era, "in which the people around him are treated like lackeys" (Serban 2008). The residence of the Romanian President is Cotroceni Palace; the headquarters for the Prime Minister and his government is Victoria Palace. The feud between Basescu and Tariceanu was thus popularly known as the War of the Two Palaces.

Among the objectives of social science is the search for patterns, regularities, and tendencies that underlie the chaos and complexity of everyday events. The focus of this chapter is the strategic practices of President Basescu. The claim is that, beneath the explosions of temper and sudden shifts in behavior, Basescu maintained a rational proclivity first to create a political crisis, next to elevate above the crisis as the unifying Head of State, and then to create crisis anew. The pattern is demonstrated by examination of three key episodes from the Basescu-Tariceanu period: snap elections, presidential suspension, and minister rejections. Basescu was not the first post-revolution Romanian President to feud with his Prime Minister. Even further, we believe, the tendency toward such conflict is structured within the institutional relations of the semi-presidential form of government, especially in new democracies where the roles and powers of institutional actors have not fully stabilized. This analysis, therefore, is intended as an illustrative case-study for a phenomenon believed to be somewhat widely applicable.

Semi-Presidentialism as an Institutional Form

Semi-presidential government, first identified by Duverger (1980), indicates the presence of a simultaneous dual-executive with a President independently elected for a fixed term *and* a Prime Minister/Cabinet responsible to the Parliament. Occurring in a variety of constructions, it is estimated that currently there are approximately 54 semi-presidential governments in the world (Elgie and Moestrup 2007, Elgie 1999). It is the most rapidly growing form of institutional design, appearing quite often in situations of transition from authoritarian to democratic political systems. Regarding post-communist Eastern Europe, as Frison-Roche concludes, semi-presidentialism represented an equilibrium solution, where "incumbents saw in the model the possibility of preserving a share of power, and the anti-communist elite quickly realized the opportunities provided by it for acquiring their part of power while being protected against a totalitarian reversal" (2007, 59). Politically, emergent forces demanded rights of voice and inclusion, while former elites sought protection against the mobilized masses that appeared to threaten established interests. Institutionally, there was a desire to constrain executive power sufficient to indicate the firm rejection of communist authoritarianism, yet simultaneously there had to be decisiveness and cohesion in government necessary to implement socio-economic reform despite inchoate political parties and a weak civil society.

Academic advocates for semi-presidentialism find a valid case for dual-executive leadership: giving the President a supervisory role and national per-

spective intended to counter the potential for political fragmentation and instability as can be found in multi-party pure parliamentary systems; giving the Prime Minister and Cabinet day-to-day governing capacity intended to escape the potential for veto-player deadlock or executive power aggrandizement as can be found in pure presidential systems (Blondel 1992; Sartori 1997; Pasquino 1997; 2005). Critics, by contrast, argue that bipolar responsibility sharing is not capable of moderating the aspirations and interests unleashed in complex societies, and that the structurally compound dimensions of political legitimacy establish an inescapable potential for institutional ambiguity and personal tension across the divided executive (Linz and Valenzuela 1994, Lijphart 2004).

Aggregate empirical studies show uneven results. Roper (2002) found that stronger presidential powers within semi-presidentialism correlate with greater cabinet instability. Elgie (2005) found that highly presidential semi-presidential regimes did not prove effective in establishing and retaining democratic freedoms, while those with more balanced powers regularly encountered intra-executive conflict. Studies focused on Eastern European indicate that semi-presidential systems with stronger presidential powers tend to show less ideological distance between the two governing executives (Protsyk 2005a); yet there is potential for serious intra-executive conflict regardless whether the President and the Prime Minister are from the same or different political orientations (Protsyk 2005b), whether the regime is more president-dominated or more premier-dominated (Protsyk 2006).

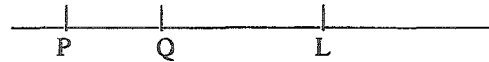
Nevertheless, most of the published work on semi-presidentialism is methodologically comparative, examining differences either across countries or in a single country over time. None are essentially strategic, oriented toward the calculations of executive actors attempting to secure power and maximize influence in a fluid institutional setting. As such, this chapter seeks to add a dimension missing in previous studies. Derived deductively from a quite simple model, it hypothesizes that the independently-elected President systematically will have rational incentive sequentially to provoke and then transcend government crisis as a means of promoting individual visibility and demonstrating political effectiveness. Applied to Romania, the conclusion is that Basescu, whether consciously or not, was acting inconsistently but not unpredictably according to the strategic logic of semi-presidential government.

The Strategic Logic of Dual-Executive Conflict

Imagine an elementary one-dimensional spatial map, with two institutional actors and a status quo position (Q). In a pure presidential system, the actors are the President (P) and the median position in the legislature (L), in which only the legislature has the right of agenda initiation but both have equal veto power over the outcome.

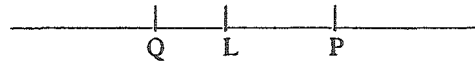
The President and the legislature are on opposite sides of Q. Stalemate will occur, since both of the veto players must agree for policy enactment but each would prefer the status quo to anything acceptable to the other (situation 1-1)

Situation 1-1:



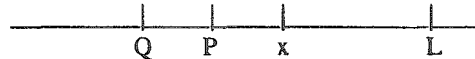
The President prefers more extensive reform than the legislature, but the legislature with control over the agenda has no motivation to introduce a change from Q greater than L. The President certainly prefers L to Q and thus will most likely accede (situation 1-2).

Situation 1-2:



The legislature prefers more extensive reform than the President, but the President would reject L as much further than his ideal point than Q. The legislature therefore proposes x, which it prefers to Q and is within the President's range of policy indifference (situation 1-3).

Situation 1-3:



Next, imagine the same situations in a pure parliamentary system, in which the two actors are the Prime Minister (L), as head of government with support from the majority in parliament, and the Head of State (P) with no governing powers. Quite obviously, the outcome in all three situations would be L, since there is only one effective player with full capacity for initiation and no fetters upon enactment.

Let us instead posit a semi-presidential institutional system that, like most, is comprised of at least a moderate amount of intra-executive power sharing. Importantly, neither the Prime Minister nor the President entirely dominates governance. The Prime Minister and Cabinet are awarded principal governing authority.

Applied to Romania, the Constitution states in Article 102 that the Government, comprised of the Prime Minister and other ministers as established by law, shall, "in accordance with its government programme accepted by Parliament, ensure the implementation of the domestic and foreign policy of the country, and exercise the general management of public administration" (Constitution of Romania 1991). The President, by contrast, lacks the powers of initiation or veto but is given the power to delay. According to Article 77, the President must promulgate all laws submitted to him within twenty days, unless he returns the law to Parliament for reconsideration, and he may do so only once; if the recon-

sidered law is again submitted to him by Parliament, the President must promulgate it. Under such conditions, the outcome for semi-presidentialism in all three of the situations mapped above would be the same as in a pure parliamentary system, ultimately arriving at position L regardless of the preference of the Head of State.

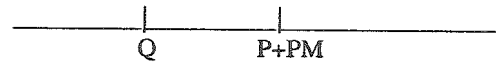
Yet the dynamic typical to semi-presidential government does not end here. The Romanian President is also constitutionally instructed (Article 80) to "represent the Romanian State," to safeguard its national independence, unity and territorial integrity, "to guard the observance of the Constitution and the proper functioning of the public authorities," and "to this effect, he shall act as mediator between the Powers of the State, as well as between the State and society." In essence, the President is intended to stand above the quotidian politics of normal governance, speaking instead for higher values and protecting the stability, legitimacy, and prestige of the regime. His exemption from quotidian governance is by design, deemed essential for the capacity to intervene with national authority if and when those actors responsible for quotidian governance lose proper direction or fail to function appropriately.

Moreover, the analysis of semi-presidential governance cannot end with constitutional stipulations alone. First, the President requires prestige and precedence in order to perform the superior duties formally assigned to him. Political respect is not automatically forthcoming. A President who is minimally engaged pending times of regime crisis would most likely be incapable of quickly generating the required stature and effectiveness whenever crisis arrives. Second, the President even if affiliated with the governing coalition often has distinct partisan, ideological, and factional interests. Reserved involvement implies policy neutrality and sacrificed influence, ceding normal decision-making entirely to the Prime Minister. Finally, the President is an elected politician, the only leader with a truly national constituency. Constrained activism entails limited visibility and is rarely the route toward popularity and re-election.

Strategically, the President's position is delicate and complex. On the one hand, in order to successfully play his assigned constitutional role, the President must go beyond that constitutional role, and he is strongly reinforced in this proclivity toward greater activism by policy, partisan, and personal considerations. On the other hand, such activism carries a risk that the President might then appear like any other ordinary politician, drawing him into factional conflicts and depriving him of the superior status he demands. The challenge of effectiveness for the President in any system of dual-executives is to negotiate this dilemma. This chapter explores the strategy of presidential play, applied to the Romanian case under Basescu. We suggest that there is one particular tactic—"induced crisis"—that is logically appealing to any President under semi-presidentialism striving to maintain visibility and achieve influence in a manner consistent with his designated transcendent role. Basescu was especially reliant upon this tactic, fundamental for understanding his behavior, successes, and failures.

Imagine under semi-presidentialism a governing coalition uniting the party/faction of the Prime Minister (PM) with the party/faction of the President (P). The sides have negotiated their differences and produced a common program (situation 2-1).

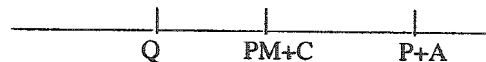
Situation 2-1:



Harmonious marriage creates difficulty for the President, who now has no critical role to play. The regime is secure, authorities are functioning properly, and there is no pressing need to act as mediator standing above social conflicts to restore unity and order. Harmony thus entails presidential invisibility and increased political weakness.

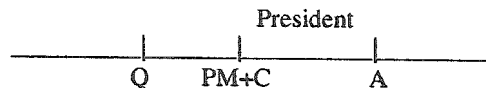
The President thus has incentive to break from the Prime Minister, to establish an independent stance sufficient to draw attention and improve his leverage. It is done most easily by stepping outside of the coalition consensus, publicly proclaiming that the government position is insufficient to advance core national objectives (situation 2-2). A welcome opportunity might be the fight against corruption with the President asserting that the government's reform efforts are not energetic enough, that the Prime Minister or his friends are still entangled in corrupt networks, that the deeper cleansing initiated by the President's own faction has been blocked or circumvented.

Situation 2-2:



On the assumption that the President (P) can carry his faction (A), tensions rise within the governing alliance. The Prime Minister (PM) is surprised and angered that his fickle allies are now attacking the agreed-upon coalition position (C) as insufficient. He might even feel politically handcuffed, for he is bound as parliamentary leader to endorse that collective coalition position which he might not even personally fully support. Whereas weeks previously, there had been speculation that the main ruling parties might formally fuse, now there is fear that the government could collapse entirely. Matters have shifted into a crisis, establishing the preconditions for the President to assume his transcendent role.

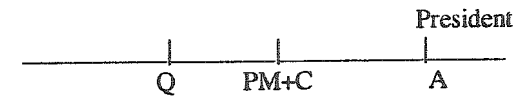
Situation 2-3a:



From this initial position, there are two different ways that the President can elevate above inter-party conflict for the purpose of defending national integrity,

and he can move back-and-forth across the two strategies. First, he might play the Political Unifier (situation 2-3a).

Situation 2-3b:



As savior of the regime, the President strives visibly to reconcile rival interests, soothe ruffled feelings, and restore coalition accord (that he initially had disturbed). Fulfilling constitutional duties given to no other political actor, he abandons his supporters, organizes inter-party negotiations, and proudly announces the peace settlement. The Prime Minister accedes, for any other posture would make him appear intentionally divisive. The restored alliance holds, until the President again feels the incentive to diverge and renew the game of induced coalition crisis.

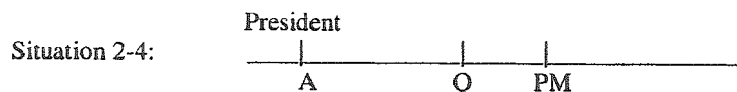
The other elevated option for the President is to play Political Moralizer. Again he finds justification to adopt a transcendent role, but not with the purpose of confirming the political center. As safeguard of national integrity, the President instead declares that the government's internal critics are fundamentally correct and that he has a moral duty under the constitution to announce it, demanding reform on behalf of an outraged citizenry (situation 2-3b).

The Prime Minister will tend to see the episode in terms of Situation 2-2, that the President has engendered a split merely for short-run personal and partisan gain. He will charge that the President and his faction are not immune from similar charges of impropriety. He will accuse them of duplicity, disloyalty, and disruption. Yet politically the Prime Minister is trapped, for again he is duty bound to defend the broad governing coalition over which he presides, born from inter-factional compromise. His only other option is to absorb the onus of breaking the governing coalition (to which the President still announces allegiance) and joining instead with long-hated opposition factions. The President, by contrast, will see the episode in terms of Situation 2-3b. His constitutional obligation is primarily to the nation, focusing its attention on higher principles, regardless (allegedly) of the consequences for coalition politics. The crisis ends with respite rather than accord, when the distinctive presidential identity is sufficiently established and the President comfortably steps back from divisive issues, for there are other policy matters before the country that still require dual-executive cooperation.

Repeated play of presidential "induced crisis" does entail risk. It encourages personal animosities and political distrust. It enfeebles the government and deprives the State of needed legitimacy. To his erstwhile allies, the President now appears increasingly arbitrary, inconsistent, egotistical, and destructive. Ultimately, he is accused of failing to fulfill his assigned duties—dividing rather

than unifying, undermining rather than safeguarding. Forces then mount demanding the President's censure and possible impeachment.

Let us assume a parliamentary attempt at impeachment. The Prime Minister is strategically limited, standing as an ordinary politician complaining that the President similarly has acted as an ordinary politician. The President has the structural advantage for he can always rise to transcendent moralism, replying that parliamentary resistance is grounded upon the effort of corrupt and entrenched factions to thwart the fundamental reforms loudly proclaimed as necessary for national integrity.



Let us further assume further that the impeachment effort fails and the President is confirmed in office, but as a consequence he and his faction are in political opposition to the government, itself damaged by defections and divisions. The result is tense cohabitation, a situation permitting a third variant of strategic elevation (situation 2-4).

Under cohabitation, the President is free to attack the government at will, picking fights intended to enhance his prestige and the interests of his party. The complication is that, given the rules of semi-presidentialism, he typically lacks the capacity to enforce his "superior" preferences. He is formally able only to delay, criticize, and embarrass. In Situation 2-4, outcomes will occur at position PM on the condition that the Prime Minister and Cabinet successfully escape votes of no-confidence. It is thus rational for the President to seek expansion of his formal powers of leverage, especially new veto rights over critical decisions, as replacement for the informal influence lost when he was cast into opposition. The President also should strive to reinforce those agencies that report directly to him against the Prime Minister's efforts to reconstruct them. Crisis expands to constitutional dimensions, with little incentive to restrict hostilities. Somewhat ironically, the elevated President's persistent attack on the nation's political class has the reverse effect of reviving and reinvigorating that embattled political class.

This chapter analyzes three episodes from the Basescu-Tariceanu period of Romanian politics—snap elections, presidential suspension, and minister rejections—interpreted in terms of the situations modeled above. To goal is to explore the structured game of induced crisis and reveal the strategic incentives motivating the players. There is some circularity to the approach. Methodologically, as an Analytic Narrative (Bates et al. 1998), the purpose is to use a deductive model to improve understanding of the cases selected, and simultaneously to use the cases to establish plausibility for the deductive model. The model is not intended to be comprehensive in its explanatory power. Although the model

is here simplified for ease of presentation and application, it is capable of more precise specification, with identified payoff structures and decision nodes. Although the empirical account is confined to contemporary Romania, the argument should have considerably wider relevance. While play within each nation will vary, the underlying framework should be relevant across semi-presidential governments, especially in new democracies where institutional roles remain fluid and an established regime of responsibility and responsiveness has not been fully consolidated. The Romanian case study is intended as an illustration for a set of logical incentives that, under specified but common conditions, are broadly structural and inherent.

President as Transcendent Unifier (Situation 2-3a): Snap-Elections

Each preceding post-revolution Romanian President feuded with at least one of his Prime Ministers (Verheijen 1999; Blondel and Penescu, 2001; Gallagher 2005). Ion Iliescu, for example, fought intensely with Petre Roman within the councils of the National Salvation Front until Roman resigned to form his own political party. Emil Constantinescu fought with Radu Vasile during the period of the Democratic Convention to the point of dismissing Vasile unconstitutionally by presidential decree. Iliescu during the return of the PSD to power faced persistent tensions with Adrian Nastase, infighting over appointments and party control. The War of the Two Palaces between Basescu and Tariceanu was not unique but was especially intense.

The Basescu period began with signs of political unity. Upon his runoff election, the new President explicitly sought Tariceanu as Prime Minister. Their electoral alliance of Democratic and National Liberal parties commanded fewer parliamentary seats than the competing alliance of Social Democratic and Humanist/Conservative parties. Yet the Romanian President (Article 103 of the Constitution) has discretion in his selection of Prime Minister in cases where no party has an absolute majority, at which point the designated individual has ten days to construct a government and win parliamentary confidence. Basescu announced his conviction that the Prime Minister should come from within the Truth-and-Justice Alliance, to implement its promised reform agenda and insure cooperation rather than cohabitation within the dual executive. On December 30, 2004, at the official swearing-in ceremony for the Tariceanu government, the President stated that he was ready "to work shoulder to shoulder with the Premier" in carrying out their joint program. Similarly, the Prime Minister said that, "together with the President of the country, they will form an active partnership for the fulfillment of the assumed objectives" (Zamfirescu 2004).

Cooperation, however, was not forthcoming. The multi-stage story regarding snap elections shows Basescu discovering the value of "his image of 'man of crisis', as he himself provoked some of these crises, to which it was also him

who found solutions, while others he ended by statements contrary to his initial ones" (Dumitrescu 2005b). At each stage, the President has to decide whether or not to push hard for the Prime Minister voluntarily to resign and establish the preconditions for new elections. If the President pushes, the Prime Minister and his government coalition has to decide whether to accede to the President's request or reject it. If the Prime Minister rejects resignation, the President has to decide whether to retreat on behalf of intra-executive unity or continue the fight; if the Prime Minister accepts resignation, the President has to decide whether to go along or further differentiate himself, reversing position to advocate long-term government stability. What appears as gross behavioral inconsistency and sudden shifts in position can be reinterpreted as logical behavior of attack-and-recede within the presidential game of induced crisis.

Stage I

Snap elections were first mentioned as a presidential tactic during the negotiations that brought the Hungarian and the Humanist/Conservative parties into the coalition government. Those minor parties were threatened with the possibility of irrelevance if the Alliance could win in new elections an outright majority, against which they were offered the benefit of ministries and access to power in exchange for giving Tariceanu the parliamentary endorsement he demanded. Almost immediately afterward, however, President Basescu took steps to distance himself from the very coalition government that he had celebrated and helped to construct. Allegedly expressing a mere personal opinion, he attacked the inclusion of the Humanist Party as an "immoral solution" (Ciocoiu 2005) and he broached the idea of quick elections in order to rid the government of the party and its controversial leader, Dan Voiculescu, a billionaire media mogul and alleged former high-ranking officer in the *Securitate*. The object of quick elections, insisted the President, was to give the Alliance complete control of power rather than depend for its majority on former adversaries.

Prime Minister Tariceanu did not accede. His overriding concern was to establish a working accord among the various coalition partners. "Early elections," he said, "should be called only when a political crisis occurs and this is not the situation now." The main government goal is to "ensure a normal and stable course," especially as Romania goes through the accession process to become a full and equal member of the European Union (Dumitrescu 2005a).

Viewed politically, each actor was playing rationally given his institutional position. Prime Minister Tariceanu was consolidating his grip on power, establishing his precedence over the mechanisms of government and securing the inter-party partnership essential to his rule. President Basescu was discovering that normalized conditions entailed a loss of the popular preeminence that the Head of State enjoyed immediately upon electoral victory. Separation was a tactic to regain Alliance leadership, confirm the President as the principal representative of the Romanian people, and guarantee him the status to criticize gov-

ernment actors if they strayed from their announced course. Yet, early in 2005 in the face of coalition optimism and accord, there was no evident target for presidential assertions of higher morality and so Basescu backed off temporarily, at least until Romania had signed the treaty of EU accession in late April.

Stage II

As the signing date approached, press speculation increased regarding the future of the governing coalition. The initial honeymoon period had ended and time for effective action had come. There was widespread talk of Cabinet reshuffling and snap elections to purge from the government ineffective administrators and disloyal partners. With tensions intensifying within the PD-PNL Alliance, it was then logical for the President to shift and adopt the role of political unifier, as if he had not helped instigate those tensions in the first place. Snap elections, he stated, were not a priority in the short-run and Tariceanu was still his choice to head the government. "There is not any dissension between us," Basescu declared. "I appreciate the performance of the Tariceanu Government for the capacity to have recouped some of the delays and to assume the present day obligations" (Anghel 2005). Yet the President had learned another lesson. Although the focus of his criticism was the minor parties in the coalition, a strong attack on government partners could appear simultaneously as an attack on the government directorate. For now this was inopportune, implying a degree of disunity unjustified by existing coalition protocols. It could make the Romanian regime look to European observers more fragile than it actually was. As Head of State, it was time to speak confidently of national aspirations and collaborative obligations.

Stage III

In mid-June 2005, President Basescu resumed the offensive, announcing that he was not a happy President and condemning mafia-like structures in the economy and special interest control of the media. In an interview to Radio France International, he promised a "massive beheading" if major legislation remained bottlenecked and key institutions did not prove their efficiency by the end of six-months of government rule (Serban 2005). Again, talk of snap elections was revived. The significant change from earlier in the year was the poll results. While the Truth-and-Justice Alliance still commanded strong support in public opinion, for the first time the Democratic Party was favored relative to its National Liberal Party ally. Anticipating a more favorable algorithm for representation, the PD aggressively joined its President in distancing itself from the ruling coalition, threatening political crisis.

For the Prime Minister's National Liberal Party to refuse snap elections, it had to acknowledge that the Alliance position could not always prevail in Parliament; yet, to admit such weakness was to further enable Democratic Party

aggression and righteous calls for snap elections. The view of the PD, from both principle and political advantage, was that loyalty to the Alliance and its electoral platform did not require automatic acquiescence to a government viewed as insufficiently effective. The resulting turmoil provided incentive for President Basescu again to shift visibly to the higher mediating role awarded to him by the Constitution, transcending and unifying across contending forces. Putting his own party "in its place," he announced in a BBC interview that any breach of the Alliance "would be a big mistake and a great political error." To make peace with the Liberals, he declared that snap elections were off the agenda. "Since no consensus has been reached within the Alliance on the early elections, it would be too late for the topic to be approached from now on. Maybe, we shall re-launch the topic after the country Report of the European Commission is released, next autumn" (Grigoros 2005a).

Announced Resignation

This presidential move toward unity put Prime Minister Tariceanu in a corner. His argument against the need for snap elections was based on the assertion that the existing government successfully could enact needed reforms and ensure coalition accord, but by July both claims were in doubt. On July 7, the Prime Minister suddenly declared his intention to tender his resignation and initiate the procedures for organizing early elections. Abandoning the role of broad coalition mediator, sounding almost like the Basescu, he declared rhetorically that "Citizens will decide if we go on the hand of justice reform or continue with the same wretched system" (Musat 2005).

Ironically, political positions had switched. Despite the complicated process necessary to invoke snap elections, despite the uncertainty of those elections for political parties and for individual legislators wishing to preserve their mandates, and despite the potential setback to EU accession timetables, Prime Minister Tariceanu claimed that effective pursuit of the Alliance agenda required such a dramatic move. There was still no obligation for him to resign, nothing essential had changed within the pattern of coalition behavior, and the government certainly was not facing a no-confidence vote. The Prime Minister had, however, accepted the logic of the President's induced crisis.

By contrast, President Basescu now openly spoke on behalf of conciliation. Although surprising to many observers, it was a rational move of transcendence. Organizing a meeting of major political actors at Cotroceni Palace, he asserted that "solutions can be found if there is political will" (Grigoros 2005b). As President, he said, it was not his role to take sides in conflicts among government actors, but to work toward accommodation and lasting agreement. Implicitly, he separated himself from the inter-party vulnerabilities that sat at the root of the conflict and from the intra-executive maneuvers that had precipitated it. Political discord gave incentive for the President instead to practice strategic elevation on behalf of national integrity.

Retracted Resignation

On July 17, Prime Minister Tariceanu reversed his decision, announcing that he and his Cabinet would not resign. Justification ostensibly was the tragic floods that killed thirty-one and left thousands homeless. Probably far more important was the fact that Tariceanu had flown to Brussels and had been told personally by EU representatives that they were anxious regarding Romanian government reliability. There was also expressed annoyance within Tariceanu's National Liberal Party that his announced resignation indicated submission before the President. Within weeks, a new coalition protocol was signed and Parliament resumed its hesitant path toward reform with no major changes in actors or their actions, defended by the Prime Minister who returned to his role as manager of the governing amalgam.

Renewal of the amorphous governing coalition equally facilitated role reversal for President Basescu. Returning to the stance of critical superiority, he promised that, while the political situation seemed stable at the moment, "if slippage occurred in the . . . Alliance, he would intervene personally and set things right" (Tanase 2005). One week later, he charged that government leaders inappropriately had been influenced by economic oligarchs; Prime Minister Tariceanu allegedly had abandoned the cause of early elections only after meeting over dinner with businessmen having financial connections to the Liberal Party. The President threatened that he would not stay "in a jar . . . for specific isolation" (Zamfirescu 2005), but as a man of the common people he would act directly to protect their interests.

The topic of snap elections would be revived periodically over the coming year as intra-executive tensions grew and public support for the government fell. Yet it was now more symbol than substance, for neither Basescu nor his supporters could initiate action while Tariceanu in the effort to maintain office was emphatically opposed. Even more significant, the focus of presidential critique-and-transcendence had changed over the course of the episode. At first, it was a tactic to help force contentious political parties into forming an unexpected and hasty government coalition. Then it was directed against the minor political parties in the government, intended to push the PD-PNL Alliance to establish clear dominance within the coalition. Now it was increasingly directed against the Prime Minister and his faction within the PD-PNL Alliance, allegedly for failing to sustain the anti-corruption platform upon which they campaigned. In the process, the President gained practice in strategic differentiation, establishing his activist presence yet irritating his constitutional partner within the game of intra-executive political play.

President as Transcendent Moralizer (Situation 2-3b): Presidential Suspension

Relations between President Basescu and Prime Minister Tariceanu decayed rapidly after July 2005. To Basescu, the Prime Minister was weak and incapable as an ally in the promised mission of Romanian political reform. To Tariceanu, the President was fickle and untrustworthy as an ally in the project of joint party governance. The personal conflict had partisan overtones within the failing Alliance as the PD and the PNL quarreled incessantly over power and positions. Nevertheless, the overriding national priority was final EU accession, anticipated for January 1, 2007. For Tariceanu, preparation for accession meant preserving government stability at all costs, although the need to remove certain EU red flags regarding corruption and the administration of justice left him vulnerable to the President's attacks. For Basescu, the prospect of EU accession meant increased opportunity to play separate-and-elevate, for the nation allegedly needed his personal guidance to achieve improved efficacy and ethics. "We cannot make a contribution to dynamising the European Union," he warned Parliament, "unless we have high performance ourselves" (Serban 2006a). For more than a year, the President played the aggressive populist and was confirmed in this strategy by public opinion. The Prime Minister, for purposes of government unity, resisted pressure from within his party to respond more assertively. On January 1, 2007, Romania formally was admitted to the European Union and the pattern of political conflict changed dramatically.

According to the Romanian Constitution, there are two methods for removing the President from office. By the impeachment method (Article 96), the President can be impeached for "high treason" by a two-thirds vote of Deputies and Senators; the High Court of Cassation and Justice is given jurisdiction and the President is dismissed on the date of the final court decree. By the suspension method (Article 95), the President can be suspended for "grave acts infringing upon constitutional provisions" by a majority vote of Deputies and Senators, after first consulting with the Constitutional Court and allowing the President an opportunity to come before Parliament and offer a defense against the imputations brought; if suspension is enacted by Parliament, a popular referendum must be held within 30 days to determine democratically whether the President is to be removed permanently from or restored immediately to office.

These provisions had not been invoked prior to 2007, despite a repetitive pattern of antagonism between the Presidents and Prime Ministers of post-revolutionary Romania. Yet previous political conflicts had never before led to accusations that presidential actions, contrary to the unifying and mediating role specified in the Constitution, were undermining regime legitimacy. As Tariceanu now argued, "The Constitution grants the President not the part of player, but the part of arbitrator . . . [Instead, this] President wants to be both in the Executive, in the Government, and to control justice and to instruct it on what to do"

(Micu 2007). Tariceanu never quite understood Basescu's rational incentive to behave in this pattern. Rather than acknowledge structured presidential tendencies and attempt to accommodate and moderate them, his response was bewildered resistance as tensions accelerated.

In mid-January 2007, the opposition Social Democratic Party seized the initiative and began suspension procedures against the Head of State. Nineteen charges ultimately were filed, including breach of the constitutional provisions regulating the relationship between the President and Parliament, interference with other institutions of state, and failure to respect the role of mediator that the Constitution stipulates for the President. Strategically, proposed suspension posed a dilemma for Tariceanu and the National Liberal Party. If they rejected the PSD motion, it would entail implicit acquiescence and full license for Basescu to continue his activist behavior, despite the fact that this had angered the party faithful, demeaned the Prime Minister, and appropriated political power. If they endorsed the opposition's motion, it explicitly would entail a declaration of war against Basescu, terminating the political Alliance with the Democratic Party and putting the Liberal Prime Minister at risk of a no-confidence vote. Strategically, the proposed suspension also presented a choice for the President. He could retreat and concede in the hope of deflecting the move, or he could defy his critics with confident disdain. His principles, popularity, and the institutional incentives of semi-presidentialism propelled Basescu towards the latter option. The more he was attacked, the more he found justification for strategic elevation, claiming that the fundamental issue was not his personal behavior but the attempt by narrow and corrupt politicians to escape the consequences of higher justice. Reciprocally, the more the President showed defiance and condemned the Romanian political class, the less Tariceanu could justify Alliance unity and the more he inclined to rupture. The Prime Minister and the President thus danced inevitably toward the precipice. In the process, Basescu shifted decisively from transcendence for the purpose of government restored unity to transcendence for the purpose of declaring his critical moral primacy.

Stage I

The Social Democrats were happy to sow the seeds of discord. "Parliament must pluck up courage and teach this tyrant his place," asserted former Romanian President Ion Iliescu (Munteanu 2007). Prime Minister Tariceanu, while maintaining caution, equally was unwilling to award Basescu with political endorsement. "It was bound to happen," Tariceanu said, given the President's imperious behavior, "sliding towards a regime of personal authority" (Nitoi 2007). There was no need yet to declare institutional crisis; this was an opportunity for Basescu to revise his conduct, "to refrain from continuously attacking state institutions and to respect the independence of the legal system" (Nine O'Clock 2007). Basescu's response was unequivocal. "I believe that all my actions and state-

ments . . . since the beginning of my term as President of Romania are compliant with the Constitutional order" (Dumitrescu 2007a).

Stage II

In early February, Tariceanu and his National Liberal Party endorsed an opposition proposal to make presidential removal easier, dependent upon a majority of votes cast in referendum rather than a majority of registered voters. The Prime Minister announced that it was a simple matter of procedural symmetry, that the selection and the dismissal of a President both should be based on the same electoral principles. The President viewed the maneuver as a thinly veiled threat and replied that he would not be blackmailed into submission. Importantly, this represented the first time that the PNL overtly joined the PSD in a parliamentary vote against its Alliance partner. Basescu characterized the proposed referendum revision as preparation for a PSD coup and he admonished the pro-market and anti-communist Liberals for conspiring with their ideological enemies on the left.

Stage III

The Social Democratic opposition submitted the indictment to Parliament in mid-February but was concerned by a distinct lack of enthusiasm in public opinion. The solution was to create a committee of inquiry into the President's actions, which was intended to function "Watergate-like" in order to publicize abuses and undermine Basescu's popularity. This was authorized in late February, with members of the PNL voting approval. The committee in practice was a sham as it was stacked with outspoken Basescu adversaries, and its report concluded predictably that Basescu both violated the constitution and engaged in criminal misdeeds. Still refusing to make a commitment, Liberal Party committee delegates abstained on the final vote. A definitive list of formulated charges was then filed in Parliament and sent, as required, to the Constitutional Court for a consultative opinion. Yet the Court did not give endorsement to the President's suspension. According to the Court, impeachment should occur only for serious and repeated violations of fundamental law and, although there had been a few infringements, these were not severe enough to constitute grounds for legitimate removal from office.

Stage IV

During this entire period, the Prime Minister and the President engaged in mutual denunciations and accusations. They did not speak when seated together at public functions and childishly avoided even looking at each other (Dragan 2007). Tensions reached their climax in late March, after the Conservative Party had formally withdrawn from the ruling coalition. President Basescu wrote to the main political parties that the government should come before Parliament,

either to re-establish a viable majority or to lose confidence so that new elections could be called. Both options were acceptable to the President: restored Alliance unity would undermine efforts toward suspension; government collapse/elections would deflect focus from his troubles and most likely result in increased Democratic Party seats and replacement of Tariceanu as Prime Minister. The Prime Minister, in turn, found both options unacceptable: he and his party steadfastly wished to hold onto the reins of government; they thus would acquiesce to neither new elections nor subordination to the President. Instead Tariceanu firmly declared the governing Alliance dead. According to PNL Vice-President Ludovic Orban, "It is not enough to desire a marriage. If you go in the neighbor's bed, if you beat your wife or husband, if you drink the household money, it is not OK. That is what PD did for two years; it ridiculed its partner" (Dumitrescu 2007b). The consequence was a reconstituted, minority Tariceanu-II government, consisting of the PNL and the Hungarian party, with Social Democratic support (but not official participation) in order to obtain endorsement by Parliament. Tariceanu's job had been saved and he was now free of all obligations to Basescu and the Democratic Party. Basescu loudly criticized the new government, constructed of only 20 percent of MPs, as the product of a corrupt backstage deal with the PSD. Announcing that he would never capitulate, he was adamant that the President's duty was to speak his mind, remind the nation of the need to pursue significant reform, and act as an "extremely severe" observer of Parliament and its Cabinet (Serban 2007a).

Stage V

The suspension vote in Parliament—conducted by secret ballot on April 19, 2007—was 322 in favor, 108 opposed, and 8 abstentions. Given that the opposition parties claimed only 228 seats and that the President's Democratic Party presumably voted uniformly against the motion, the conclusion is unavoidable that nearly every parliamentarian from the Prime Minister's National Liberal Party voted in favor of suspension. Basescu refused to appear before Parliament to offer a defense. Transcending the conflict rather than engaging, he commented that politicians' "anger, hatred and incapacity . . . pushes them towards a solution that will take Romania several steps backwards" (Dumitru 2007). By the time of the vote, it was obvious that the President easily would win reinstatement by national referendum. The suspension effort therefore was little more than an expression of discontent by a majority of MPs against Traian Basescu and his behavior. The strategic logic of play under institutional semi-presidentialism gives incentive for the Head of State to seek differentiation on behalf of proclaimed national ideals. The particularly aggressive form of player-president selected by Basescu was designed to win populist favor but few political friendships.

Presidential Reinstatement

The referendum campaign was predictably venomous although somewhat anti-climatic. The revitalized Social Democratic Party organized mass rallies to celebrate its return to the public stage. The National Liberal Party finally made a formal commitment to the anti-Basescu initiative. The critical aspect to note is the structured differences in actor strategies. The more the parliamentary majority sought to denigrate Basescu and his behavior, the more Basescu effectively rose above the criticism. To his greatest opponents, Basescu was unworthy of the Romanian presidency. He allegedly was a drunkard, a former communist informer, and a person guilty of corrupt dealings. The other main argument was that Basescu had abused the Romanian presidency. His activist predisposition had entailed neglect of the constitutional obligation to pursue integrity and mediation, and instead had demeaned government officials and undermined their authority. Nevertheless, especially after the Constitutional Court advisory opinion, the impeachment campaign essentially was reduced to sour grapes—one set of elected politicians accusing another politician, whom they disliked, of being better at playing politics and using his office to seize advantage in ways they did not favor.

By contrast, suspension strategically gave Basescu further incentive to assert the high moral ground that his parliamentary opponents sought to deny him. He could portray himself the independent-minded people's delegate who used his position to denounce the communist past and control the greedy, and who was under attack by corrupt forces seeking revenge and reversal. The biggest catalyst in the partisan campaign against him, Basescu claimed, "is the fact that prosecutors have started doing their job and that there have been no more political influences upon the judiciary" (Serban 2007b). The President's response was thus to ascend rather than to defend. Playing to the internal logic of his institutional role, he asserted that the Head of State was obligated not to concede before base motivations. From the suspension declaration onwards, presidential elevation was intended for moral transcendence regardless of the effect on other political actors. The May 19, 2007 referendum results confirmed the viability of the strategy. More than 74 percent of ballots were cast against impeachment. The President returned to office victorious, vengeful, implacable, but considerably isolated—not a surprising outcome consequent to the antagonistic yet rational presidential effort at separation from and superiority over ordinary politics and politicians.

The President as Cohabitation Strategist (Situation 2-4): Institutional Powers and Minister Appointment

By spring 2007, Traian Basescu was himself in the opposition. His Democratic Party had been ejected from all ministries under the reconstituted Tariceanu-II minority government. He was hostile toward the parliamentary majority that had

sought yet failed to remove him from office. Within the dual Romanian executive, tense cohabitation had replaced tentative alliance. Politically, the arrival of cohabitation only further encouraged Basescu's activist condemnations. His critics interpreted these attacks as typical but especially nasty political play across the partisan divide, pitting government actors against those no longer in the government. Basescu, however, portrayed the situation from the moralistic perspective of the transcendent Head of State, empowered by constitutional elevation and backed by populist endorsement, who encountered resistance from those corrupt and self-seeking factions that had consistently sought to fetter the Romanian transition to democratic modernity.

The complication inherent to presidential separation-and-elevation under Romanian semi-presidential cohabitation was the relative absence of institutional leverage. Extensive media coverage granted Basescu the ability to embarrass and he used this ability dramatically, with repeated outbursts of affront and invective. Yet, for much of 2007 and 2008, the President had little capacity to force the government's hand and he now lacked even the Alliance membership that once had given to his voice automatic consideration.

In terms of modeled decision strategy, under cohabitation a President concerned by limited political capability should tend systematically to challenge the Prime Minister and his government—for a combination of personal, policy, and institutional motivations—in the pursuit of induced crisis. Since the Prime Minister retains no loyalty toward the President and need not respond, the President has rational incentive to ratchet up the rhetoric in the hope of provoking a reaction. The President under cohabitation also has rational incentive to utilize his few available institutional levers of veto in the effort to force the government to move within his range of preference relative to the status quo. The Prime Minister, who retains rights of initiation, under those veto circumstances can either resist or comply. If he resists and proposes alternatives continually unacceptable to the President, stalemate ensues and action is frozen, inviting even further elevated Presidential attacks against the government's inability to rule in the national interest. If the Prime Minister complies, yielding to the President's insistence, he gives tacit recognition to the Head of State's articulated criticism and appears weak in the eyes of his party and allies.

The best alternative for the Prime Minister is to constrain potential veto power claims from the cohabitation President by limiting the autonomy of those institutions still responsible to the President or composed of his supporters. The President, in turn, will defend those institutions and if possible should seek to claim new veto powers to impede government discretion. Deprived of informal accommodation in the intensifying War of the Two Palaces, the Head of State logically would, and did, attempt to expand his formal institutional capacity. Reciprocally, the Prime Minister would, and did, attempt to resist that capacity, viewed as imperious incursion into the domain of legitimate parliamentary authority.

Presidential Contraction I: War Powers

The Supreme National Defense Council (CSAT) is chaired by the President of Romania and has the power, upon the recommendation of the President, to initiate and terminate military actions. Romania's presence in the Iraq War was one of the few ideological issues that distinguished Basescu and Tariceanu. Despite the Prime Minister's requests, the CSAT consistently refused to countenance troop withdrawal from Iraq, citing the importance of strategic partnership with the United States and United Kingdom, the value of reliably keeping one's word in foreign relations, and the opportunities for Romania to benefit from the economic reconstruction of Iraq. Disgruntled National Liberal Party members called for the CSAT to be dismantled. Basescu replied that the proposal was "an anti-Romania putsch" (Serban 2006b). More judiciously, Tariceanu advocated new legislation to reduce the President's war powers, so that all troop deployments not required from treaty be approved by an explicit vote in Parliament. The details of the draft proposal were debated over the succeeding months as part of a broader legislative package designed to increase government control over national security policy in general and over the nation's intelligence agencies. With vehement opposition from those agencies and President Basescu urging reconsideration, the measure languished in the complexity of legislative procedures and partisan distrust.

Presidential Contraction II: Administration of Justice

Even more contentious was presidential authority to initiate criminal prosecutions of current or former government ministers in conjunction with the National Anti-Corruption Directorate (DNA). The DNA was comprised of officials appointed by Basescu, which made the agency especially controversial. During the period of cohabitation, the DNA began action against former PSD Prime Minister Nastase, three other former ministers, and two current ministers including Tudor Chiuariu, Justice Minister. Chiuariu, a member of the PNL, had attempted to purge the DNA leadership upon his appointment to the Tariceanu minority government, claiming inefficiency in management and partisan bias in operations. The DNA replied that Chiuariu was the one guilty of political abuse, seeking to interfere with ongoing criminal investigations. Bitter accusations followed, in which each side protested that it was defending independent justice against attempted manipulation. To his critics, Basescu was attempting to punish his political opponents, instituting a "velvet dictatorship" over the government (Dincovici 2007) by means of the anti-corruption apparatus. In response, Basescu publicly denied that he was an instigator behind DNA actions. On the contrary, it was the government, which was protesting and resisting when so many of its members were under suspicion, that allegedly was bringing disrespect to the nation, alienating voters, and disillusioning foreign observers.

According to the Law on Ministerial Responsibility, the President had to appoint and consult with a Special Advisory Commission in order to launch full judicial procedures and gain the right to suspend an offending minister from office while the investigation advanced. Taking the offensive, Tariceanu issued an Emergency Government Order transforming the advisory commission into a panel of three judges appointed by the Supreme Council of Magistrates. According to Chiuariu, the Head of State is "being deprived of his toy with which to suspend Liberal Ministers" (Mihut 2007). The Emergency Order was quickly reversed by the Constitutional Court for restricting a legal presidential prerogative. Yet the effort to constrain the President's autonomy over the prosecution of ministers was somewhat more successful along a different path. The Constitutional Court had ruled, interpreting the complex law on ministerial accountability, that the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, respectively, were required to approve criminal prosecutions against any current or former government member who was also an MP serving in that chamber at the time of accusation. Parliament protested and the Constitutional Court concurred that such conjoint legislative approval had not been obtained with regard to the recent DNA accusations. As a consequence, the process by which Romania could pursue high-level criminal prosecutions for abuse in office was made more difficult to implement, as was pointed out in protest by a number of international human rights organizations.

The President and his allies under cohabitation were thus partially stymied in their attempt to prosecute and remove sitting ministers considered offending. The outcome was quite different, however, with respect to the appointment of new government ministers, where the Head of State claimed and won significant powers enabling him to veto those cabinet replacements with which he disagreed.

Presidential Expansion I: Appointment of the Foreign Minister

A prelude occurred during the final, deteriorating period of the PD-PNL Alliance. In February 2007, Foreign Minister Mihai Ungureanu was forced by the Prime Minister to resign. The official reason was that the Foreign Minister had failed to notify Tariceanu promptly regarding two Romanians arrested and held at a U.S. army base in Iraq, causing him some public embarrassment when questioned about the situation. Equally important in the ongoing War of the Two Palaces, Ungureanu, although a Liberal, was an advocate of Romania's military presence in Iraq and had sided with Basescu within the CSAT. Tariceanu moved to select a more loyal Foreign Minister, nominating Adrian Cioroianu. According to the Romanian Constitution, Article 85, Section 2: "In the event of . . . vacancy of office, the President shall dismiss and appoint, on the proposal of the Prime Minister, some members of the government" (Constitution 1991). The wording is ambiguous, as it does not indicate whether the President has the ability to refuse a nomination or whether his approval is mandatory given a proposal

from the Prime Minister. According to the Constitution, the situation regarding minister replacement is distinguished from that of more extensive reshuffling where the "political structure or composition of the Government is changed," as the latter requires a formal vote of endorsement from Parliament. Basescu, claiming discretionary authority over minister replacements, refused to sign Cioroianu's appointment. Tariceanu angrily challenged the President before the Constitutional Court but the issue was never settled. The PD-PNL led coalition government soon fell and was replaced in April by the minority PNL government. Cioroianu was now named Foreign Minister under the cabinet reorganization that was ratified in Parliament and thus exempted from presidential review.

Presidential Expansion II: Appointment of the Justice Minister

The contest resumed with full venom under cohabitation, especially regarding the replacement for Tudor Chiuariu as Justice Minister. Chiuariu had resigned reluctantly in December 2007 rather than face presidential suspension and the demeaning situation of a sitting Justice Minister prosecuted for alleged corruption. Given the intensity of the battle over Justice, Liberal hardliners insisted upon a party advocate for the position—Norica Nicolai, a PNL vice-president in good standing yet who had served as prosecutor during the communist era. Basescu refused to sign the appointment, elevating moralistically across the partisan divide and claiming that "public perception of Nicolai is not likely to help strengthen public confidence in the Romanian judiciary" (Dumitrescu 2008a). More bluntly, he told the press that "fraud was her second nature both in her professional and in her political career" (Dincovici 2008). The Prime Minister and his Liberal government stood firm in her defense. "Your motives for not appointing Nicolai," Tariceanu wrote to the President, "are personal, subjective and doubtful . . . that exceed the constitutional frame" (Dumitrescu 2008a). Facing stalemate, the Prime Minister appointed Defense Minister Teodor Melescanu also to serve as temporary Justice Minister for a 45-day interim period while the Constitutional Court decided the issue.

In early February 2008, the Court ruled completely for Basescu. The Head of State, it determined, has the constitutional power to refuse the Prime Minister's nomination for a vacant ministerial office. He can do so once for each vacant office and the Prime Minister has to propose a different person for the position. The Court was making new law for a situation where the Constitution was silent, but its justification was particularly confusing. It apparently sought to follow the logic of Article 77, Section 2, which gives the President authority to return draft legislation to the Parliament for reconsideration once before promulgating it. This decision was taken as guidance for other cases where public authorities have "conjoint attributions in the adoption of some measures stipulated by fundamental law" (Dumitrescu 2008b). Yet Article 77 explicitly does not give the President veto power over legislation; Parliament could return the draft law to the President unchanged and he would have to approve it. Curi-

ously, the Court now gave the President full veto power in the case of appointments to vacant ministries, determining that the "Prime Minister cannot reiterate the first proposal" because it had been excluded "through the fact that the President of Romania has not assumed that proposal" (Dumitrescu 2008b).

Prime Minister Tariceanu withdrew Nicolai's nomination but was left in a quandary on how to proceed. One alternative was to appoint Melescanu permanently as Justice Minister and name someone else to Defense. The problem was that Melescanu was loath to accept the transfer and Basescu might refuse any plausible replacement at Defense, reviving the conflict in another guise. A different option was for the Liberal government to resign and be reconstituted with parliamentary endorsement, which would give the Prime Minister capacity to assign portfolios as he chose. The problem was that the minority government already was holding narrowly onto power and could not automatically count upon tacit support against a no-confidence vote from the rival Social Democrats. Instead, angering party militants who urged defiance, Tariceanu simply conceded. His new nominee for Justice, Catalin Predoiu, was a technical expert in commercial law with minimal partisan affiliation, who was accepted immediately by the President and sworn in on the same day.

Presidential Expansion III: Appointment of the Foreign Minister

Confirmation of the President's veto power over ministerial appointments came one month later, in April 2008. Foreign Minister Cioroianu resigned, accepting responsibility for consular service failure when a Romanian citizen died following a hunger strike in a Polish prison. Rather than risk another discomforting stalemate, Prime Minister Tariceanu moved rapidly within President Basescu's preference range. Conceding the President's authority to refuse unwelcome appointments, he selected a career diplomat instead of a career politician. Basescu equally rapidly accepted the nomination, commenting favorably on the "consensus obtained at the level of institutions that have the relevant prerogatives" (Grigoras 2008). Again the Liberal Party leadership expressed frustration with the Prime Minister's tepid acquiescence. They preferred continued political warfare in preparation for the parliamentary elections forthcoming later in the year. Tariceanu, on the other hand, believed that his principal duty was governance. The Head of State had established the capacity not only to foster induced crisis and then use his office to assert moral transcendence over ordinary politics; with respect to ministerial replacements, he had rationally pursued and now had won the right to veto new appointments. He thus had regained part of the influence diminished by the end of PD-PNL Alliance via the strategic assumption of a power somewhat more presidential than semi-presidential in format.

Discussion

As described in a *Nine O'Clock* editorial, Traian Basescu "is a rudimentary person always using aggressive language." He has "an impulsive and choleric nature," capable of "sardonic laughter and cynical humor" and is quick to denounce and "perversely humiliate" those who cross him, sensing that "attack is one's best defense." But Basescu, the writer concludes, "is a much more capable and calculated person than he allows us to realize" (Bogdan 2008). Beneath the erratic affections and ferocious condemnations lies a strategic motivation that is not in the least irrational. More instinctive than conscious, it entails an acute perception of the institutional dilemmas inherent to the position of Head of State under Romanian semi-presidentialism.

With the Prime Minister and his Parliament-endorsed government ruling on most day-to-day matters, the President must be concerned with establishing the independence and visibility needed both for his success as a politician (winning re-election, influencing policy, generating spoils for his party/faction) and for his success as a constitutional actor (promoting effectively national integrity and essential values). There is thus incentive to play induced crisis, giving opportunity for him to then step forth as an elevated actor, either to preach restored harmony within the state apparatus or to preach moral revival to the state apparatus in defense of the citizenry. Using Basescu's often-repeated phrase, there is logical motivation for the Head of State to be an active, player-president rather than a benign and passive President sitting in reserve until called upon for emergency intervention.

As an Analytic Narrative, this chapter has applied its theoretical perspective to three different political situations. The first was intra-executive alliance, with President Basescu using the strategy of separation-and-elevation on behalf of more coherent governance (by urging snap elections), which in the process humiliated the Prime Minister and helped undermine confidence in the ruling coalition. The second was intra-executive discord, with Basescu using the strategy of separation-and-elevation in defense of moral governance under attack (by resisting his suspension), which in the process denigrated Parliament and its Cabinet as the domain of the corrupt and conspiratorial in service of oligarchic interests. The third was intra-executive cohabitation, with Basescu using the strategy of separation-and-elevation on behalf of capable governance (by refusing nominated ministers), which led to intense conflicts regarding constitutional accountability. The President's critics condemn him for jeopardizing the efficacy of and trust in democratic government through the exercise of uncontrollable egotism, arrogance, and ambition. The President's defenders praise him for articulating standards of ethical behavior and transparent government decision-making through the willingness to challenge an entrenched and acquisitive political class. Our object is not to take sides in the dispute, but rather to indicate that beneath the conflict was a structured pattern of strategic play, critical (although not comprehensive) for understanding actors in their context.

Our contention is that the basic model should apply generically to intra-executive relations in semi-presidential systems, with the Basescu period in Romania serving as a particularly acute illustration. It is rational for the elected President in dual-executive regimes to seek induced crisis for purposes of visible differentiation from the Prime Minister and elevation above ordinary politics. This should be viewed as an inherent tendency, appearing in a different manner and in different circumstances across countries. The tendency, moreover, should be more strongly activated (a) the lower the level of institutional consolidation in a country and (b) the greater the complexity of political roles and coalitions. These are presented as hypotheses for future research.

Ironically, the attack by Traian Basescu against the Romanian political class has had the consequence of strengthening that political class. The powers inherent to the party system and the Parliament ensured that rival forces could organize in reaction and response. It was also predictable that the general public would grow weary of the contest, appearing as incessant squabbles among the isolated elites of central Bucharest. Since the May 2007 impeachment referendum, disaffection from Romanian electoral politics has increased. None of the three major parties approach a majority yet none seriously contemplates cooperation with any other. Basescu narrowly won re-election in the December 2009 presidential runoff and persists into his second term with the strategy of presidential visibility and moral transcendence on behalf of national integrity. In a sense, Romania had again entered situation 2-1, with the President and the Prime Minister in cooperative alliance yet with rational incentives for the President to seek differentiation, sequentially denouncing public officials for their performance and promoting regime unity when political tensions rise. Past practice suggests that Basescu will not deviate from this approach. His second presidential term should thus prove as controversial as his first.

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Political Competition and Democratic Governance in Romania

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In the early years of the Eastern European transition to capitalism and democracy, reform of the state received little scholarly interest, as the state's role in society and in the economy was deemed rightly to be shrinking. After a decade or so of transition, state weakness was becoming obvious. "The problem liberal reformers face is no longer censorship and the command economy . . . but something quite new: an incoherent state tenuously connected to a demoralized society" (Holmes 1997). Twenty years after 1989, scholars of Eastern Europe are gradually bringing the state back into analyses of democratization and economic reform. Studies of the quality of democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2004; Rose-Ackerman 2005; Ciobanu 2009) are replacing those that focused merely on the quantity of democratization.

The reform of state institutions is key to building a high quality democracy. This chapter focuses upon state strength as it relates to public accountability. Strong democratic states are governed by the rule of law, have little high-level corruption, and are accountable to their citizens through institutions of government monitoring and oversight. By contrast, exploited states are those with weak or missing government institutions of oversight and regulation, and they experience numerous public procurement, privatization, and other corruption scandals. Strong states have established such institutions as audit courts, a viable civil service, and effective anti-corruption agencies. In the absence of such institutions of democratic governance, weak states are prone to exploitation and capture by private interests.

Eastern European states were reconstructed after communism by political parties (Grzymala-Busse and Luong 2002; O'Dwyer 2004). Given the enormous changes necessary, the parties in power had great discretionary responsibility to craft new laws and institutions, as well as great discretionary opportunity to adapt them to their interests. The preferred strategy for gathering electoral resources was state exploitation or the "direct extraction of state resources and the building of new channels for such extraction" (Grzymala-Busse 2007, 2). State