Political Careers of Romanian MPs: Paths to and From Parliament[1]

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1. Introduction

Many features of a particular political system are revealed by a study of political careers. Career patterns can tell us a lot about the structure of opportunities, the formal and informal hierarchies of power and generally about the institutional arrangements in one political setting. Political careers are, however, a subject of interest in themselves. How individuals see and develop their political careers is a genuine and stand-alone research question. Career developments are, of course, dependent on institutional arrangements and on the existing set of incentives and obstacles, but the relationship is bidirectional (Schlesinger 1966; Squire 1988a; 1988b). One cannot understand the emergence of career patterns without a good grasp of the institutional configuration. And the other way round: a good understanding of institutional functioning relies on a preliminary investigation of individual ambitions.

The exploration of political careers and of their impact on the institutional development in Romania is at its very beginnings. No study thus far has been explicitly dedicated to this subject or designed to respond to the main research questions in this subfield of political elite studies. This study is meant to fill in this major gap and provide a first - and rather sketchy - description of career paths in Romanian politics.

The study is framed by the major concepts and theories of political careers as they have been developed over the last decades. Forty years ago, Joseph A. Schlesinger (1966: 10) identified three types of ambitions that drive politicians forward: "progressive" ambition (the officeholder aspires "to attain an office more important than the one he now seeks or is holding"), "static" ambition (a politician wishes to "make a long career out of a particular office"), and "discrete" ambition (the politician desires an "office for its specified term" only and intends to "withdraw from public office"). Schlesinger's typology has provided the conceptual framework for many studies of political careers (Mezey 1970; Black 1972; Hibbing 1982a, 1982b; Squire 1988a, 1988b; Herrick and Moore 1993) and, despite several

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attempts to refine it[2], it largely remained unchallenged. Alternative concepts, such as "positional" and "progressive commitments" (Black 1972: 150) are but a translation in other terms of Schlesinger's "static" and "progressive ambitions."

The main objective of the present study is to assess to which extent Romanian politicians can be classified as displaying "discrete", "static" and "progressive" ambitions. As in many other cases, this study starts with an investigation of Romanian legislators. There are theoretical and methodological reasons that explain the focus on Parliament and parliamentarians in the study of political careers. Parliament is the main institution of a democratic polity, draining ambitious politicians from less important institutions and pumping them upwards. In many political systems, statesmen who bypass the Parliament on their way to top political positions are a small minority. At the same time, data on MPs is much more easily available than data on incumbents of other local or national institutions.

Legislative studies have indirectly benefited from research on political careers. The best example of this kind is Peverill Squire's typology of legislatures according to "the career possibilities they offer" (Squire 1988a: 67, 71). The three types of legislatures described by Squire follow closely Schlesinger's types of ambitions: the "springboard legislature" is dominated by legislators with "progressive ambitions", the "career legislature" is dominated by legislators with "static ambitions" and the "dead-end legislature" is dominated by legislators with discrete ambitions" (Squire 1988a; Squire 1993). A second objective of the present study is therefore to see to what extent the Romanian Parliament fits in one of these three categories.

2. Up on the ladder? Some theoretical considerations

Theories of political careers are grounded in a number of assumptions, some of them with a clearly questionable nature. These theories usually revolve around the notion of "progress", of "advancement" from a lower political level/office to a higher one. Politicians move "up" in their careers as if they climb "a ladder."

There are two related but not necessarily overlapping assumptions in this approach. One is that some offices are more important than others, the second that politicians are always driven "up" from lower to higher offices. The first assumption implies that we can identify a

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2   Rebekah Herrick and Michael K. Moore, for example, have added to Schlesinger's typology the "intrainstitutional ambition" defined as "the members' desire for leadership positions within their present institution" (Herrick and Moore 1993: 765).

clear cut hierarchy of offices, the second that a successful political career is one that builds up from lower level offices to the higher ones.

Both assumptions are problematic. There is no argument about the fact that a mayor is politically better placed than a local councilor, but how can one decide whether a deputy minister is more important than a mayor, or a legislator higher in his/her status than a presidential advisor? Establishing a uni-dimensional hierarchy of offices was always a challenge for the student of political careers. Usually this problem is overcome by ordering the offices according to the financial benefits attached to them. The problem with this approach is that an office might also bring extra, informal, non-financial gains that are hardly quantifiable, but extremely sought-after by politicians.

One recent attempt at providing criteria to classify offices on a "political ladder" was made by Wayne Francis and Lawrence Kenny: "each move up tends to be associated with a greater sphere of political power, increased ability to achieve political goals, greater financial gain, and possibly increased self-esteem" (2000: 2). Francis and Kenny suggest that politicians seek to increase their "territorial jurisdiction", "electoral constituency" and (financial and non-financial) "compensations" (2000: 3). In many cases, the three are positively correlated, as greater territorial jurisdiction and electoral constituency are usually accompanied by greater compensations. This set of criteria is helpful in spelling out the "clear steps of the political ladder", although even Francis and Kenny recognize "there are exceptions and different paths to high office" (2000: 5). In some cases, as we will discuss below, these "exceptions" question the heuristic value of the notion of "political ladder."

The second assumption is equally problematic. It proves fragile on at least two grounds. There are politicians who do not take great pains to climb all the rungs of the ladder to reach the top: they start their political career with sometimes very high offices. Besides, there is enough evidence that politicians (especially those who enter at the top of the political ladder) do not always move "up." In many political settings, we can find politicians who accept offices that can be considered lower than those previously held. Schlesinger's typology accommodates other career patters and accounts for politicians who simply stay on the same "ladder rung" for most of their careers, but it completely overlooks the cases of politicians moving down the ladder. These cases appear to contradict the general understanding of how careers develop in politics.

This contradiction can be easily dissipated if we take into account the implications of the following three considerations. An analysis of career ambitions has to be matched and accompanied by an analysis of the structure of opportunities. One general observation is that

the higher the office, the more limited is its availability[3]. Another observation is that, even the more accessible offices – be they elective or non-elective – are normally subject to competition. So, regardless of how "progressive" their ambitions are, politicians have to mobilize their energies and resources to be able to compete successfully with other politicians with similar "progressive" ambitions. Most of all, they should consider the possibility of a defeat and prepare alternative career plans. In case of defeat, they should adjust their ambitions accordingly.

The assessment of the chances to get the desired office is normally made before the competition for offices is opened. Politicians might realize that they do not have the resources needed to access their most desired office and accept that chances for success are slim. In many occasions, they are faced with a hard choice between the risky possibility of getting the most desired office and the more tangible perspective of getting a less desired one. Failure to get the most desired office might translate into a - politically costly - temporary suspension from political life. This is why politicians prefer sometimes to step back, to move down on the political ladder rather than to remain out of politics for an indeterminate period of time.

The third and equally important consideration is that politicians might be genuinely interested in having offices located lower on the formal "political ladder." It might be that their subjective perception of the importance of offices is at odds with the popular perception of the office hierarchy. Apparently a legislator who leaves Parliament to become the mayor of a city suffers a demotion. This might not be the case, as the local office is probably perceived to bring more benefits to the ambitious politician than the legislative office. Politicians might indeed be forced by the circumstances to assume lower offices, but they might as well want and strive to get them.

3. Three levels of politics

Local, national and legislative offices. In my opinion, the notion of a "political ladder" is restrictive and somehow misleading, for the reasons shown above. Therefore, in the following lines, I will favor a classification of offices in only three broad categories. As I will try to show below, this three-fold typology can be much more insightful and give us a better and much more flexible framework to discuss political careers.

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3   There is one president, less than twenty ministers, several dozens of mayors of major cities, hundreds of MPs, but tens of thousands of local councilors.

First of all, offices can be classified into *local* offices and *national* offices.[4] This is a widely accepted distinction that does not require elaborate explanations. Local offices are all the public offices whose "jurisdictional territory" is not larger than the largest administrative unit in which a country is divided. In contrast, national offices cover "jurisdictionally" the whole country. In general, political parties organize themselves along the same lines, closely following the structure of public offices. At the local level the party sets up party branches. These are topped by several layers of "national" bodies, ranging from large and broadly representative "councils" to small size executive "bureaus."

We can define a *local politician* as one who developed most of his/her political activities in the local institutions, in public and/or party offices. At the same time a local politician can be characterized by strong local roots, visible in the fact that his/her residence, former workplace and other interests are located in the constituency where s/he is active politically. By contrast, a *national politician* can be defined as one who developed most of his/her political career in the central (especially executive) public institutions and/or in the national structures of the party. In most cases, a national politician is "rooted" (with his residence and previous workplaces) in the capital city.

This dichotomy between local and national offices appears to exhaust the existing offices. However, I would like to propose in this paper a separate treatment of the institution of Parliament.[5] I would like to argue that we gain more insights into the development of political careers if we consider the Parliament aside from either local or national politics.[6] The Parliament as such is a national institution, but its members belong to both worlds of politics (local and national). In most political settings, the Member of Parliament is called to play a double role, as a representative of a given local constituency and as a national decision-maker. In other words, a legislator is – I would argue – a *local* and a *national* politician *at the same time*. From this perspective, the Parliament is the hub of the political system, the hinge between local politics and national politics. At least in the study of political careers, it makes sense to consider the Parliament separately, on a different level of politics, somewhere

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4   This distinction follows the distinction between "territorial levels" introduced by Klaus Stolz (2003). Stolz identifies three levels of politics: "local, regional and national." This three-fold typology is useful for federal states or for states where regions have not only a historical but an administrative identity as well. Romania is neither a federal state nor a state with intermediate-level institutions. The following analyses will distinguish only between "local" and "national" offices, but can be easily expanded to include "regional" offices. My three-fold typology is however different from Stolz's three-fold typology as it singles out the Parliament and makes it a separate level of politics.

5   This conceptual framework does not account for European-level offices, as it was outlined before Romania joined the EU.

6   In the remaining of the paper, "national politics" should be understood in the narrow sense of "national executive politics," to exclude the Parliament who is distinguished as a separate level of politics.

between the local and the national levels. Therefore the third category of offices is made up of parliamentary offices.

I believe this analytical separation and the basic distinction between local politicians and national politicians will greatly improve our chances to map the flows of transfer from one level of politics to another. It will also help dissipate the apparent paradox of legislators retiring from the Parliament to assume positions at the local level, one of the "oddities" mentioned above.

Movements between levels. Within this conceptual framework, a political career can be understood as a sequence of movements on any of or between the three levels of politics. In any given political setting, the major challenge of the student of political careers is to identify career patterns in a rapidly changing environment, defined by movements of politicians at "different speeds" (so to speak) and in all directions. At every political level, we should be able to identify the size of groups of politicians who continue their career at the same level, move to another level or get out of politics altogether, in other words politicians with "static," "progressive" and "discrete" ambitions. I am particularly interested in the movement *between* levels and in the following I will concentrate my efforts to assess the relative importance of the "flows" of transfer from one level to another.[7]

As underscored above, the general expectation is that, at least over the long term, politicians move "up," having clearly identifiable "progressive" ambitions: from local politics to the Parliament and then to national politics. This expectation is grounded in the common belief that generally speaking careers start at the lowest levels of politics and build up gradually but steadily till the highest offices. As I have already mentioned, we should be prepared to account for "atypical" career paths: from national politics to parliament, from Parliament to local politics.

The stake of this research, however, is not only to see how many politicians move gradually from local politics to Parliament and then to national executive politics and then compare these numbers with the numbers of politicians who take the path back, from national to local politics, via the Parliament. We could and expect to find, one the one side, local politicians with parliamentary experience who return to local politics, and, on the other side, national politicians with parliamentary experience who return to national politics, whenever

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[7]   In Romania, we can not but focus almost entirely on movements between level, especially if we start our investigation from a
     Parliament that is characterized, as we will see, by high turnover and small number of "career" legislators.

this is possible (displaying therefore "static" or "progressive" ambitions inside the same level).

If this is indeed the case, we might then be able to say, in general terms, 1) that career paths have not one but two main starting points (one in local politics, the other in national politics), 2) that politicians can be characterized as either local politicians or national politicians and 3) that Parliament is, with very few exceptions, only a political buffer zone for politicians from both categories.

We will thus be able to conclude that the two categories of politicians – "local" and "national" - overlap only marginally. This is certainly not a new hypothesis, as almost forty years ago Dwaine Marvick discovered that the fragmentation of "the political realm" in "*provincial* and *central* institutional complexes" inevitably leads to "career orbits" that "interpenetrate at only a limited number of points" (1968: 280).

4. Political offices and institutions in Romania

Administratively, Romania is divided in 41 counties and the capital city, Bucharest. Each county is run by a county council made up of 31-37 county councilors. Bucharest is run by a general council made up of 55 councilors. One of the most important local elective offices is held by the president of the county council, which is, since 2008, directly elected by the voters in each constituency.

The county council oversees the activities of the localities belonging to the respective county. Localities are administrated by a mayor and a local council. Local councilors elect from their own ranks a vice-mayor (or two, in the case of the cities that are county capitals). Bucharest is dived in six districts, each of them governed by a district mayor and a district council.

Local and county councilors are elected on party lists every four years. Mayors are elected in a uni-nominal ballot in two rounds. The elections for mayors, local and county councils are organized simultaneously in the so-called "local elections." After the 1989 revolution, local elections have been organized in Romania in February 1992, June 1996, June 2000, June 2004 and June 2008.

In each county, the central government appoints the prefect who is the representative of the central authorities at the local level. Since January 1, 2006, the prefect is a "high" public servant. Before that date, he was a political appointee.

The most important office at the national level is of course the office of the president. The president is directly elected in a two-round competition. He is assisted by a varying number of presidential counselors, appointed by him. The prime minister, the ministers, the secretaries of state (deputy ministers) and the sub-secretaries of state, but also the heads of some special state agencies are the main officeholders at the national level.

The Romanian Parliament has two chambers: the Senate (the upper chamber) and the Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber). Until 2008, deputies and senators have been elected on separate party lists, slated in each legislative constituency (which overlaps with the administrative counties). A new electoral system was adopted in 2008: the old proportional representation party-list system was replaced by a mixed one. Every constituency was broken down in single-member districts, separately for the Chamber of Deputies and for Senate. Under this system, there is a direct allocation of seats in the case the winner gets an absolute majority of votes, followed by a proportional redistribution of seats at the constituency and national level in the remaining cases. An electoral threshold of 5% is in place since 2000 and was left untouched by the new law. In November 2008, 137 senators and 334 deputies have been elected under the new electoral system to the Romanian Parliament.[8] The number of deputies includes 18 representatives of 18 different groups of ethnic minorities. The law sets aside legislative seats in the Chamber of Deputies for the groups of ethnic minorities that run in elections but fail to pass the electoral threshold. There is only one ethnic minority that, since 1990, always managed to pass the electoral threshold: the Hungarian minority (which makes around 8 percent of the total population).

Legislators are barred from being managers of state-owned or private companies or from occupying other public responsibilities, with the exception of member of the cabinet. It is already a custom that most of the members of government are selected from the Members of Parliament.[9]

Data on MPs and local elites. Career paths in Romanian politics will be explored with the help of public and survey data on past career moves, but also on career ambitions and preferences. The following analyses are based on data collected on Members of the Parliament and on local elites.

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8   The number of MPs varied across time, as after 1992 the number of deputies and senators elected in each constituency varied according to the number of the population. In 1990, Romanians have elected a Parliament with 398 deputies and 119 senators. In 1992, there were 341 deputies and 143 senators, in 1996, 343 deputies and 143 senators, in 2000, 345 deputies and 140 senators, in 2004, 137 senators and 332 deputies

9   For a full account of selection of ministers in post-communist Romania, see Stefan 2009.

Public data on all the Romanian MPs since the first free elections of May 1990 until (including) the elections of November 2008 has been coded and gathered in a comprehensive dataset called ROMELITE (2193 cases).[10] For obvious reasons, this dataset is not fully adequate for a comprehensive investigation of career plans and preferences. Therefore, a survey of legislators sitting in the lower chamber of the Parliament was designed and carried out in the spring of 2003.[11] The survey included questions on circumstances of getting in politics, on political experiences before and after 1989, and on details of their selection as candidate for legislative offices. A number of 177 members of the Chamber of Deputies (representing 52% of all the deputies) have responded to the survey questions. The sample is representative on several dimensions, including party affiliation and previous parliamentary experience.[12]

With high turnovers from one legislature to another, public and survey data on MPs could provide only a snapshot of the larger picture of political personel dynamics over time. It became obvious that a focus on MPs, even though it provides a wealth of information on career paths, has to be complemented with in-depth analyses of careers and career preferences of members of other political institutions. To this purpose, I have designed a survey of local political elites,[13] which was carried out in two waves, in spring 2004 and spring 2005 (the "local elites" dataset comprises 768 cases). Data on local politicians combined with data on MPs gives us a more solid ground for a general assessment of political careers in Romania.

5. Paths to Parliament

The investigation of the career patterns of Romanian politicians starts with an exploration of the paths leading to Parliament. The most usual way of exploring this issue is by assessing the political experience of MPs before their first election to the Parliament.[14] Table 1 provides a comprehensive picture of the types of experiences displayed by the members of the lower chamber (in 2004 and in 2008) before the date of their first accession to the Romanian Parliament.

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10 Data was gathered and coded with the help of Razvan Grecu, Todor Arpad, Bertha Nita, Irina Ionescu, Maria Victoria Cristache, Monica Negrila and many others to whom I am extremely indebted and grateful.
11 A similar survey, albeit much more comprehensive and comparative in scope, is planed to be carried out in the summer and fall of 2010.
12 Details of the research design and main research findings can be found in Ştefan 2004a.
13 "Local political elites" have been defined as leaders of the county-based local party branches.
14 This issue is also addressed in Ştefan and Grecu (forthcoming).

Table 1:   Pre-parliamentary political experience of deputies* elected in 2004 and 2008

Type of experience	Total 2004		Total 2008	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**
Exclusively at the local level **(mayor, local or county councilor, prefect, deputy prefect)**	**130**	**41.4**	**153**	**49.2**
- at the local level, exclusively elected (mayor, local or county councilor)	92	29.3	127	40.8
- at the local level, exclusively appointed (prefect, deputy prefect)	21	6.7	16	5.2
- at the local level, mixed, both elected and appointed	17	5.4	10	3.2
At both the local and the national levels	**11**	**3.5**	**17**	**5.5**
Exclusively at the national level (minister, secretary of state, presidential counselor)	**30**	**9.6**	**24**	**7.7**
No previous political experience	**143**	**45.5**	**117**	**37.6**
- public servants, diplomats, other state officials	44	14.0	35	11.2
- leaders of interest groups (of trade unions, of unions of students, artists etc.)	11	3.5	8	2.6
- managers (of state or private companies)	56	17.8	50	16.1
- professors, journalists, liberal professions	27	8.6	23	7.4
- holders of leading roles in the revolutionary structures (January - April 1990)	5	1.6	1	0.3
Total**	**314**	**100**	**311**	**100**

Source: ROMELITE dataset.
* The 18 representatives of ethnic minorities have not been included.
** Sum of figures in bold (the four main categories). Information was no available for five deputies elected in 2008.

In 2004, almost 42% of the Romanian deputies have had some kind of experience in local institutions only, as either elected or appointed officeholders, before successfully running for parliament. Almost 10% have held major political responsibilities in national institutions (mostly as ministers or deputy ministers), and fewer than 4% displayed relevant experience in public institutions at both local and national levels. Therefore, in 2004, almost 55% of Romanian deputies have held at least one political office at the local or national level, or both, before their first legislative mandate. Out of the remaining 45% with no previous political experience, a third (representing 14% of all deputies) has been in public service, at the local or national level (as public servants in the ministries and other local institutions, as directors of local branches of national agencies etc.).

Things have slightly changed in 2008, likely due to the new electoral system which priviledges stronger ties with the constituency and the district. The shares of MPs who now display some kind of experience at local level are up to 49% (only at the local level) and to 5% (local and national) respectively. MPs with experience in national political institutions are down from 10% to 8%. Accordingly, the number of MPs with no previous political experience decreases to 38%, but the share of former public sevants is down only with roughly three percentage points. In general terms, around 70% of all deputies (69% in 2004,

74% in 2008) have been already involved in politics and/or administration when they first run for Parliament.

The members of the Chamber of Deputies who have never had any political or administrative office before running for Parliament are drawn overwhelmingly from the economic sector – and a substantial majority is made up of managers of private companies and wealthy businesspersons: they represent more than half of this group of deputies with no previous political or administrative experience. The remaining deputies have a career in the media or in the education sector, have a liberal profession or belonged to various interest groups, especially trade unions, when they have been co-opted in politics by one of the mainstream political parties.

Based on this data, we can conclude that the "vocation" to become a legislator in the Romanian Parliament is unequally distributed between people already exposed to local politics (42-49%), people already exposed to national executive politics (around 8-10%) and newcomers to public political offices (around 37-45%). However, a little less than a third of the latter group had previous experience in state institutions as public servants.

Looking at past political records, we can thus identify a group of less than 50% of incumbent deputies with "progressive" ambitions indicated by their successful move "upwards" from local politics to the parliament. A group of a slightly smaller size, however, features people who start their political career with a legislative mandate, which contradicts the assumption that most politicians start their careers "at the bottom of the ladder" (see above).

The small group of legislators with past experience in the national government provides food for thought and another challenge for some of the most common assumptions in the study of political careers. The case of former members of the government seeking election to the Parliament questions Schlesinger's three-fold typology of "ambitious politicians." Clearly, they do not display "discrete" ambitions, as apparently they make efforts to keep their feet on the political ladder. Are they driven by "static" or "progressive" ambitions? The step from national government to the Parliament can hardly be accepted as a "progress." If we really want to make use of Schlesinger's typology, I would argue that they have "static" ambitions: they would have liked to continue their ministerial job, but circumstances were such that the position was no longer available to them. Until a similar position opens again to them, they have to "shelter" themselves on the lower rung that is accessible to them. These

national politicians have been forced by the circumstances to "go down" one level and wait for the opportunity to return to national (executive) politics.[15]

One should only note, for the time being, that there are only a few MPs with political experience accumulated at both levels of politics, local and national. This could be taken as evidence for the argument that the category of "local politicians" overlaps only marginally with the category of "national politicians."

MPs' local roots. There is another way of looking at the flows of transfer from local to national politics via the Parliament.[16] In the Romanian electoral system, each legislator is called to represent one constituency, and after 2008 an even smaller-scale district. Accordingly, there are reasonable expectations that the MP has pre-existing ties with the constituency s/he represents. In the competition for legislative seats, politicians with a local background should in principle have an edge over politicians without any local background. The evidence, however, at least from the Romanian case, prompts us to consider an alternative hypothesis: in some cases, the local roots are a strong impediment to running for a parliamentary seat. This is so because becoming an MP means a partial delocalization to the capital city. Local politicians are not always willing to move to the next level of politics. There is evidence that some of the most influential and well-positioned local leaders prefer a career at the local level and baulk at the perspective of going to Bucharest, even if the "reward" is a seat in the Romanian parliament.[17] This is one reason why local politicians willingly give up their representational role to "parachuted" national politicians (see section 7).

There is an expectation that, in most cases, MPs are elected in the constituency of their residence. For local politicians elected to the Parliament in the constituency where they reside and where they previously performed political roles, becoming legislators represents a step outside the framework of local politics, but only a small one. The same can be said about the national politicians who are elected in Parliament in the Bucharest constituency: in their case, there is no real transfer from "national" to "local" politics.

Much more interesting is the case of MPs elected in a constituency that is not the constituency where they reside. Students of political careers call these MPs "parachutists", as they "land", apparently from nowhere, in a constituency about which they have limited

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[15]   Good examples can be found on the benches of the cabinet sworn in in December 2008: six ministers have started their political career as ministers or deputy ministers, and only after that they ran (successfully) for the parliament. Reelected to the Parliament in November 2008, they have been again called to serve as ministers – and they did not turn the offer down.
[16]   For a full treatmernt of this subtopic see Stefan and Grecu forthcoming, section 4.
[17]   For some not so recent examples, please see Stefan 2004b.

knowledge. Usually, they are national politicians or people with no political experience, but based in Bucharest, who "land" as candidates for Parliament in constituencies outside Bucharest.[18]

There is one subgroup in this category that deserves particular attention: the "parachutists" who run in the constituency of their birth. This subgroup can be set apart as, although no longer living in it, its members keep however some ties with the constituency through their families and through their contacts established during their young age. Aggregate data comparing the size over the years of these three groups of MPs has been put together in Table 2.

Table 2:   Local background of Romanian MPs, deputies and senators (%)

	1990	**1992**	**1996**	**2000**	**2004**	**2008**
MPs elected in the region of residence	75.11	77.11	62.67	63.76	68.98	83.54
Parachutists (no ties to the constituency)	7.28	13.18	20.11	18.83	21.99	13.11
MPs elected in the region of birth	6.02	5.86	9.61	6.36	4.22	3.35
Incomplete information	11.59	3.85	7.61	11.05	4.81	0.00
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: ROMELITE dataset.

Table 2 indicates that, before 2008, between 63 and 77% of MPs have been elected in the constituency of their residence. The MPs with this profile can also be found in the group of around 45% of MPs with experience in local politics. Before the change of the electoral system, around 30% of MPs had not lived in the constituencies where they have been elected. This other group includes "national" politicians, i.e. politicians with previous experience in political institutions at the national level, in the central administration, or in the national party headquarters, who could not find a slot on the party slates in Bucharest.

The Table provides new evidence that the electoral system adopted by Romania in 2008 has clearly reached one of its objectives: to get voters closer to their representatives. Indeed, as figures from the table indicate, there was a sharp increase of the number of legislators elected in the constituency of their residence. Consequently, the number of "parachutists" almost halved. Politicians with this profile either refused to run for parliament or have been defeated by "locals"[19].

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[18] This is the case of many former ministers, who desperately try to find a political shelter in one of the party's local constituencies.

[19] In 2008, unlike in previous years, a greater number of outgoing ministers "parachuted" outside of Bucharest failed to get elected.

Politicians from this latter group offer us an example of less usual career steps from national politics to local politics. "Parachuted" MPs or MPs returning to their birthplaces develop – in different degrees, it is true, and depending mostly on how genuine is their commitment for a legislative career – a close relationship with their constituencies. In some cases, "parachuted" MPs are reelected to the same constituency even if they had no ties whatsoever to it initially. A good recent example is Victor Ponta, the leader of the Social-Democratic Party (elected to this position in March 2010) who, although from Bucharest, has run on party lists in a constituency 500 kms west of Bucharest. He got reelected in the same constituency in 2008, this time after running in a single-member district. He is another example of a former minister with "static" ambitions: a member of the cabinet in 2004, he was called to serve as minister again in December 2008.

Three main paths to parliament. I have identified three major paths to legislative office. One starts in local politics, another in national politics, the third in the non-political sectors of society. A majority of Romanian deputies started their career in local politics and moved "up" to the parliament, running in their local constituency. A small group stands out as after a major governing position made a tactical step back taking a seat in parliament, in some cases representing the capital city Bucharest, in others representing constituencies outside Bucharest.

The remaining are newcomers to public politics (some do hold positions in their parties). This group can be divided in two almost equal parts. One subgroup includes deputies who have roots in the local constituency and, in some cases, have held responsibilities in the local public administration. The other subgroup is made up of deputies who are "parachuted" in constituencies outside of the capital, although they are Bucharest-based politicians. Some in the first subgroup might continue as legislators or try to get an office at the local level – being close to the profile of "local politicians." Similarly, some in the second subgroup might continue as legislators or try to get an office at the national level. Others in both groups will return to their previous "non-political" life after this short political episode (providing examples of "politicians" with "discrete" ambitions).

6. Career Perspectives of Legislators

The question now is: once in parliament, what is the next career step of our legislators? Is the Parliament the institution where Romanian legislators plan to develop their careers, is it only a "springboard" to other, more desired offices, or simply a one-time experiment?

The first question to ask is to what extent Romanian legislators build their careers inside the Romanian parliament. One very common measure is the average number of mandates and the rates of turnover (see Squire 1988a: 66). As I have noted in the introductory lines, this can be an indicator of the "stability" of the legislature. In its turn, the stability of the legislative body is likely to affect its professionalization (Squire 1988a, 1988b).

Table 3:   Indicators of parliamentary turnover

	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Mean number of elections	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.7
Percentage of newcomers	71.8	64.1	60.9	58.4	62.3

Source: ROMELITE dataset.

Table 3 presents the mean number of elections in which deputies have stood successfully and the percentages of newcomers. As we can see, the first indicator is growing from 1.3 in the second free elections of 1992 to only 1.7 in 2004 and 2008. In more than nineteen years of parliamentary democracy and after six rounds of parliamentary elections, the average length of a legislative career is still shorter than two mandates. This is a consequence of the extremely high intake of newcomers, around or more than 60%.[20] In 2004, only 23.2% of the elected deputies had previously served another mandate in the Parliament and as little as 18.4% have completed two or more mandates. Figures are 22.7% and 15% for the parliament elected in 2008.

In the Romanian context, with a short post-communist democratic life, we may define a "career" legislator as one who has served at least three mandates in the parliament. If we accept this definition, legislators with "static" ambitions are a small minority in the Romanian Parliament. Therefore, the Romanian legislative body can hardly be considered a "career" legislature, according to Squire's typology. Is it then a "springboard" or a "dead-end" legislature?

To get a definite answer to this question, we need to know the political and non-political roles assumed by former MPs at the end of their term in office. I could not compile the necessary information, but I suspect this is largely due to the fact that most former MPs have left politics altogether at the end of their term.[21] To make up for the incomplete information,

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20 Electoral volatility plays a role, but not a significant one. Parties that have not been seriously affected by electoral volatility have significantly renewed their parliamentary groups.

21 There is sparse evidence about the post-legislative careers of a number of former MPs: they are recuperated by their parties as parliamentary counselors, heads of various governing agencies or representatives of their parties in various boards. But many go indeed back to their previous careers, or start new businesses capitalizing on the political experience accumulated while in Parliament.

an alternative strategy was designed, whose research focus was 1) on voluntary terminations of the mandate and 2) on the opinions of MPs themselves about their career perspectives.

According to data from Table 3, since 1996 only around 35-40% of the outgoing MPs managed to get another mandate. What political processes may explain this outcome? Are there the MPs themselves no longer interested in pursuing a parliamentary career (do we then have a predominance of MPs with "discrete" ambitions)? Are they interested but the voters do not like them? Or are they interested but the party selectors refuse to nominate them again? We might start having an answer only if we enlarge our basis of analysis and take into account an earlier stage: whether or not politicians run or rerun for parliament.

I have been able to compare the lists of candidates for the legislative elections of 2008 with the legislators siting in parliament between 2004 and 2008. The full picture looks extremely interesting as the whole population of outgoing MPs can be roughly divided in three equal shares: one third re-run and was reelected, one third re-run but was not reelected, and the last third did no longer run (see Table 4). The deputies (who are in average five years younger than the senators – see Stefan and Grecu, forthcoming) are more likely to run for reelection than the members of the upper chamber.

Table 4: Members of Parliament 2004-2008 running for reelection in 2008

Status after the elections of November 2008	deputies 2004-2008		senators 2004-2008		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
reelected in the CoD	124	32.9	7	4.3	131	24.3
reelected in the Senate	20	5.3	33	20.2	53	9.8
run, but not reelected	113	30.0	56	34.4	169	31.3
did not run	120	31.8	67	41.1	187	34.6
Total	**377**	**100.0**	**163**	**100.0**	**540**	**100.0**

Source: ROMELITE dataset combined with a CANDIDATES 2008 dataset.

Regardless of how many MPs would like to continue, there is a fact that only less than 40% do so. Out of these, more than half, as we have noted earlier, just completed their first mandate. The group of MPs with three or more mandates (labeled earlier "career" legislators) is even smaller (15-18% in 2004 and 2008). In this latter case, we are rather safe in asserting that these legislators have "static" ambitions. But can we say the same about all the MPs who sought reelection, whether or not they have been successful? From an external point of view, this should indeed be the case. However, their attempt to get reelected might be only the outcome of a balanced assessment between what is available and what is accessible. I want in

the following lines to explore this issue, more precisely the extent to which MPs are really committed to a parliamentary career.

There are two ways of finding whether there is indeed a gap between what is desired and what is "taken,"[22] in other words whether the Parliament is a "springboard" institution or not. One way is to analyze the circumstances of retirement from the Parliament before the end of the term. This might be an indication of a "discrete" ambition, if politicians discover they are not suited for a legislative career and – more generally – for a political career (see discussions in Hibbing 1982a, 1982b). It can also be an indication of a "progressive" ambition, when politicians resign to take over other (higher?) public responsibilities. It might happen that offices that have been probably "spotted" before the election to parliament, but were unavailable, become available during their legislative term.

We should, however, bear in mind that the number of offices that might become available after the legislative elections (ministerial offices, appointive offices at the local level etc.) are rather limited. Therefore we should assume that some of those who are not offered this chance and therefore do not resign might be equally interested in getting another office, provided the opportunity arises. The only way to find out is by directly asking the legislators about their actual career preferences.

An analysis of the voluntary retirement from Parliament should draw a line between those MPs who, by resigning from Parliament, resign their political careers and those who resign from Parliament but continue their political career in other offices. The question we should ask in the latter case is what is their next office?

Deputies and senators win difficult electoral battles and spend a lot of energy, time and money to make sure they get in the Parliament. Becoming an MP should represent the climax of a political career, and a major political achievement. Why, after significant investments, some legislators decide to resign? If we accept the idea that the legislator is a rational decision-maker who "thinks strategically" (Squire 1988a: 67) then we have to admit that another office might bring more satisfaction and benefits than the legislative office.

Table 5:   Number of resignations per total number of deputies and senators

1990-1992	1992-1996	1996-2000	2000-2004	2004-2008	2008-2010*
81/517=15.7%	43/484=8.9%	25/486=5.1%	62/485=12.8%	68/469=14.5%	2/471=0.4%

Source: ROMELITE dataset.
* Not fully comparable, as term ends in 2012.

Table 5 presents the percentages and absolute numbers of deputies and senators who resigned from Parliament between 1990 and 2010. Unfortunately, not all the circumstances of the resignations are fully clear, and, due to the level of missing data, it was impossible to compute relevant statistics for the six legislatures. This should not, however, block the attempt to explore the various rationales behind the resignations.

First and foremost, the overwhelming majority of MPs who resigned over the years from Parliament (cf. Table 6, no less than 85% during the 2004-2008 period) abandoned their parliamentary seat *for other public offices*. In the nineties, there have been prominent local officeholders (presidents of county councils, in some cases) who decided to put their name on the parliamentary lists only to bring more visibility to the party locally. They had no intention to sit in parliament, as they largely enjoyed the status and benefits attached to the local position. They resigned from the Parliament in the early days of their parliamentary term and continued their career at the local level.

In the aftermath of parliamentary elections, when new power configurations take shape, many presidential counselors, state secretaries, prefects or directors of various governmental agencies (and even ambassadors) are often selected from among the elected MPs. Because of the incompatibility rules, they are forced to resign from Parliament. This was not a major problem for their parties until 2008, as the next on the party list was called to replace the MP who resigned. However, the new electoral law in place since 2008 imposes the organization of by-elections if one MP decides to quit the legislature. Therefore, (governing) parties have been forced to change their selection targets and favored politicians from outside the Parliament for governing positions. Most of the cabinet ministers (even after 2008) are also picked from among the MPs, but since 1992 they have been allowed to continue to sit in the Parliament while performing their ministerial tasks.

A number of parliamentary mandates are terminated following successful bids in local elections, which make MPs renounce their parliamentary seat to become mayors, presidents or vice-presidents of county councils. As local elections are organized in Romania approximately six months before the end of the legislative term, it is not unusual to see dozens of MPs tacking leave from Parliament to campaign for local offices. Every four years, the parliamentary activities are disrupted by the local elections for several weeks.

22   This issue was extensively explored in Stefan 2004b.

More recently, some members of the national Parliament have opted for the European Parliament and a sizable number of MPs had to interrupt their national political career to jump at the "next level"[23].

To assess the proportion of MPs who resigned to take over other public responsibilities (compared to those who abandoned their parliamentary career for personal reasons), I looked into the patterns of resignations of legislators belonging to one of the major Romanian political parties, the National Salvation Front (FSN: 1990-1992) and its main successor, the Party of Social Democracy in Romania - later called the Social-Democratic Party (PDSR/PSD: 1992-2008). For a broader picture, I have added a column with the "types" of resignations in all the parliamentary parties during the 2004-2008 legislature.

Data in Table 6 supports the previous assertion that most of the resignations are prompted by the desire of MPs to occupy other public functions at the national or local level. Although the figures cover only the FSN and the PDSR/PSD, they account for 60% of resignations recorded between 1990 and 2004. The situation changed after 2004, when PSD was no longer in government (resignations of PSD MPs account for only one third of all resignations). We may note that MPs are - in aggregate terms - inclined to take up positions at the local rather than at the national level. A closer look at the background of these MPs indicates that those who resign to assume offices at the local level can be included in the category of local politicians, the others in the category of national politicians (illustrative examples can be found in Stefan 2004b: 190-193).

The evidence collected and presented above points to the fact that, for a sizable number of MPs, a seat in Parliament is not the most desired public office. For some, having their names on the lists of candidates for the Parliament is nothing more than a "strategic candidacy", and a seat in one of the chambers only a "refuge", a "shelter" until other public positions become available.[24] Around 13-15% of Romanian legislators voluntarily resigned from Parliament between 2000 and 2008. Among them, around 2% displayed "discrete" ambitions and left politics altogether. All the others (11-13%), however, can be characterized as legislators with "progressive" ambitions (in a broader meaning) who have been given the possibility to materialize them. To have a complete picture, we should probably add to this figure the 4%

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[23] It is worth mentioning that three MPs out of the 15 who had to resign from the national Parliament to go to Brussels made the way back resigning from the EP after winning a seat in the national Parliament.

[24] Leonard Ruchelman writes that, for many MPs, "the legislative office is but a way-station where they can establish eligibility for more desirable positions on the political career ladder. The act of departure, in such cases, is probably planned and anticipated from the moment of first arrival in the legislature." (1970: 100) Squire (1988a) uses Ruchelman's observation to describe its "springboard legislatures."

of MPs who have been picked to serve as ministers (but were allowed to keep their parliamentary seat).

Table 6:   Offices assumed after resignation from Parliament: number of FSN (1990-1992), and PDSR/PSD (1992-2004) deputies and senators, PSD and all parties (2004-2008)

Office after resignation	FSN 1990-1992	PDSR 1992-1996	PDSR 1996-2000	PSD 2000-04	PSD 2004-08	All parties 2004-08
Country President	-	1	-	-	-	-
Minister	7	-	-	-	-	-
Secretary of state	6	2	1	2	-	-
Other office in the central administration (including presidential advisor)	3	1	-	11	4	15
Ambassador	3	3	1	3	-	1
Total national offices	**19**	**7**	**2**	**16**	**4**	**16**
President or vice-president of the county council	17	1	1	8	1	16
Elected mayor	6	-	-	-	4	8
Other office in the local administration	3	1	-	-	-	-
Prefect	10	6	-	6	-	2
Total local offices	**36**	**8**	**1**	**14**	**5**	**26**
Member of the European Parliament					8	15
International Institutions					1	1
Total public offices	**55**	**15**	**3**	**30**	**18**	**58**
Personal, or unknown reasons	9	9	4	2	4	10
Total resignations	**64**	**24**	**7**	**32**	**22**	**68**

Source: ROMELITE dataset.

Career preferences of MPs. In the previous section, I have focused on the past behavior of MPs, and especially on the career moves of those MPs who have been effectively offered the opportunity to take over other political responsibilities. In the case of these MPs, we can easily guess their career preferences, as they are translated into *actuality*.

As I suggested above, whenever possible, we should go beyond behavioral patterns and expand the exploration into the career preferences. To complement the above analysis, it is therefore necessary to explore the *potential* for mobility of the deputies who have not resigned their position in the Parliament. In order to probe into this matter, the parliamentary survey included questions about the MPs' order of preference regarding various public offices.

In response to the question "Compared to other public functions, how important is the function of legislator for you?" only a narrow majority of MPs (53%) declared that the parliamentary mandate is indeed "the most important public function." Very importantly, a fifth of the respondents (21%) expressed their clear preference for executive positions, either at the national (15%), or at the local level (9%).[25] More than a quarter of the respondents (28%) have said that "all [public functions] are equally important". Maybe these MPs are indeed convinced that all (the mentioned) offices are important, suggesting in this way that they are equally available for all of them.

These figures are consistent with the answers to yet another question. MPs have been asked to rank the offices they would accept if they are asked to choose from a list of twelve offices that they were hypothetically guaranteed to obtain in the next elections: mayor, county councilor, president of the county council, prefect, deputy, senator, high public servant, secretary of state, minister, ambassador, international public servant, presidential counselor.

Almost a third of MPs, 55 out of 175 surveyed (31%), did not select any of the two legislative offices (deputy or senator) as their top choice. Sixteen MPs would prefer to be ministers rather than deputies, while five others would be happy with the position of deputy minister (state secretary). Twelve deputies declared their preference for the presidency of the county council, seven would have liked to be elected mayors, and six others looked forward to becoming prefects. Ten would have prefered to work in foreign environments as either ambassadors or international public servants. A few would rather become county councilors or simple public servants than continue their career in parliament.

In the previous section, we estimated at around 15-17% the group of MPs who have been effectively offered the chance to move in their careers according to their preferences (including the minister-parliamentarians). Based on survey data, we have now an even better estimate of the size of the group of MPs with "progressive" ambitions: at the time of the survey (Spring 2003), 31% of Romanian deputies were looking outside the Parliament for their next office. Their preferences are similar to those of the resigning MPs, but, unlike them, they had not been offered at the time of the survey the opportunity to fulfill their career aspirations.

The first such opportunity was provided by the local elections of 2004, and – not surprisingly - some of the MPs who declared in the survey their preference for executive offices have successfully run and moved to local politics. More than 60 MPs ran in the local

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25 Percentages do not add up to 21% and to 100% as a number of MPs had multiple responses.

elections held in June 2004, and more than twenty resigned after being elected to one of the top local offices (as mayors, presidents or vice-presidents of county councils). We might be tempted to say that there is a ratio of 2:1, between all MPs who aspire to move to a "better" (whatever this might mean) political position and those who eventually succeed.

What is the political profile of these deputies with "progressive" ambitions, who aspire to other public offices during their tenure as legislators? Is there any congruence between their preferred office and their political background? In many cases, the MPs' previous political experience is a relatively good predictor of their top preferences. Not in the narrow sense that, if they have been local councilors or deputy ministers they would like to occupy the same position in the future, but in the sense of an expected and deserved promotion at the level of politics where they started their career. Former county councilors dream of being elected presidents of county councils, and deputy ministers look forward to a ministerial seat. The political background is a good predictor mostly in the sense that "local" politicians have preferences for higher local offices, whereas "national" politicians prefer to advance their political career at the national (executive) level. This finding suggests the existence of two rather distinct types of politicians – the local politician and the national politician – which overlap and intersect only marginally.

7. Local Elites: Careers and Perspectives

The most thorough and comprehensive investigation of MPs' career paths and preferences tells us nothing about politicians who failed to get into the Parliament or were simply not interested in a legislative mandate. We need to broaden our perspective and include in our analyses relevant findings about groups of politicians "located" in other institutions. In the following lines, the focus will be shifted to what I have called the local political elites.[26]

A sample of 768 local politicians from more than 25 counties have been surveyed in 2004 and 2005. At the time of survey, more than 95% of them were leaders of their party organizations at the county or city level – and this is why they qualify as "local political elites." The remaining 5% occupied a position in the national party leadership. Most of the local party leaders held public political offices at the local level (63.6%), a majority being active as local or county councilors (51.8%), the rest (11.8%) being mayors, vice-mayors,

prefects or deputy prefects. Another 4.7% have been public servants and less than 1% held in the past a position in the central government. Almost a third (31%) of our sample held no public office at the time of survey.

A comparison between the past attempts of local political elites to secure offices at the local level (mayor, local and county councilor) and their attempts to become Members of Parliament is extremely relevant for their career prospects and preferences. On the one hand, three times as many local politicians have run for a local office than for parliament. On the other hand, the chances of being elected are more than double in the local elections than in the parliamentary elections (see Table 7). Since 1996, around 70% of the candidates for local offices have been successful, but only around 30% of those running for Parliament. These findings appear to confirm the "local vocation" of local elites, i.e. their orientation towards offices at the local level.

Table 7:   Candidacies of local elites to local offices and parliament

Candidacy			Rate of success	
	n	**% out of total population**	**n1**	**% out of n**
	To local offices			
in 1992	99	12.89	79	79.80
in 1996	186	24.22	135	72.58
in 2000	350	45.57	225	64.29
in 2004	253	32.94	176	69.57
	To Parliament			
in 1990	23	2.99	12	52.17
in 1992	35	4.56	16	45.71
in 1996	64	8.33	20	31.25
in 2000	141	18.36	37	26.24
in 2004	94	12.24	23	24.47

Source: The "local elites" dataset

To understand better why local politicians channel their preferences to either local offices or Parliament, I have included in the survey a question on the circumstances under which members of the local elites accept to run for Parliament.

Answers to this question provide new evidence that only a few local politicians are willing to include a legislative mandate in their political careers. Only 23% of the subjects of the

survey said they are willing to run for Parliament "in any circumstances." At the opposite side there is a group of a similar size (21%) whose common position is to refuse outright such a perspective. The remaining ones would reluctantly accept if they have little chances to get a much more rewarding local office (17%) or if their party insists they should run for Parliament (39%).

This obvious and partly surprising reluctance to climb a rung and go to the Parliament may explain why "parachutists" (including "national politicians" with no local roots) meet little resistance when they are selected by their parties to represent parliamentary constituencies outside the capital city. This finding is confirmed by the answers to a direct question on the circumstances under which local political elites accept "parachutists" on the lists for Parliament in their constituencies.[27]

We may note with some surprise that local politicians are relatively tolerant to the imposition by their national party leadership of candidates with no local roots, called to represent their constituency. Only a little under 50% oppose this type of candidacy (47%). More than 50% consider that there are circumstances that may justify the selection of national politicians to represent their constituency. Local politicians are open mostly to politicians with a nation-wide reputation (33%). They are less welcoming but still open to "parachutists" if they are members of the national party leadership (4.5%), or if they have already successfully run in the same constituency in the past (8%). Some local politicians have nothing against the "parachutists" if the local party organization has poor electoral scores (7.5%).

We can conclude this section by noting that local politicians strive overwhelmingly to occupy positions at the local level. A minority is tempted by a parliamentary seat, but the reluctance of the majority to upgrade their political status with a legislative mandate leaves the representation of local interests in the Parliament partially in the hands of members of a "national" elite. These findings complement and support the findings presented in section 5.

8. Conclusion

Career patterns are not very diverse in post-communist Romania. There are, first of all, two rather distinct categories of career politicians: the local politicians and the national

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27   Question reads: "Under which circumstances do you accept a politician with no local roots to run on an eligible position on the candidate lists of your party?"

politicians. Second, there are of course the "outsiders" who join political parties and assume public offices for a small period of time at both the local and national levels. They are successful business people supporting the party, people with local or national reputations or simply deserving party members. Some of them display "discrete" ambitions, but some are genuinely committed to start a political career. Their future political career is strongly determined by their local roots: in the province or in the capital city. It is interesting to note for how many the Parliament is the starting point of their political careers.

I found that politicians with "progressive" ambitions dominate the Romanian political landscape. However, their upward movement is in the majority of cases confined to one level of politics, either local or national. Parliament acts – for this type of politicians – as a buffer zone, a temporary shelter for those whose most desired offices are temporarily unavailable. The local politicians start as local or county councilors, but dream of becoming presidents of the county councils or prefects. The most skilful try their chances as mayors of important communities. On the other hand, the national politicians start their career in offices in the central government or in Parliament as experts and advisers. If they have enough expertise or political clout they can become one day ministers or deputy ministers. If they get to work closely with popular leaders, they might have the chance one day of becoming presidential counselors.

There are very few who mix in their careers local and national offices. Although Parliament is the venue where local and national come as close as possible, it however reflects the distinction between local and national politicians.

Only about a fifth of MPs are really interested in building a career inside the Parliament and can therefore be characterized as displaying "static" ambitions or "positional commitments" (Black 1972). A little less than a third have been found to aspire to other offices (driven by their "progressive" ambitions), either at the local or at the national level, in line with their political profile as "local" or "national" politicians. There is also an impressive (but hard to establish precisely) number of newcomers to the Parliament who terminate their political career at the end of their first legislative mandate. Therefore I would say that the Romanian Parliament can be tentatively characterized as a "dead-end" legislature, populated with a sizable group of politicians with "progressive" ambitions.

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