



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Romanians protest against austerity measures, 2012

10 January

2012

to: 5 February

2012

Country: Romania

Location City/State/Province: Cluj, Targu Mures, Bucharest

Goals:

Rejection of healthcare reform and other austerity measures, resignation of the President, Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister, an end to political corruption

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 113. Strike by resignation

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Romanians
- members of the Iași National Liberal Party (PML)
- supporters of Mobile Emergency Service for Resuscitation and Extrication (SMURF)

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Dr. Raed Arafat

Partners:

The Mobile Service Emergency Resuscitation (SMURF) administrators, The Iasi National Liberal Party (PNL)

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Iași National Liberal Party (PML)
- Mobile Emergency Service for Resuscitation and Extrication (SMURF)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Dr. Raed Arafat (Exit)

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Arafat disassociated himself from the protests after resuming his appointment at the Minister of Health. It is unclear whether SMURF members or supporters also withdrew their support, or were among the peoples who continued to protest in the following month.

Segment Length: 4 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Boc Administration, President Băsescu

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Throwing bottles, smashing store windows, antagonizing police with rocks

Repressive Violence:

Police use tear gas to disperse the crowd, some protesters injured

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Although significant healthcare reform also remains doubtful under current austerity measures, protesters succeed in getting Boc and B?seescu to drop the initial reform bill denounced by Arafat enough so that Arafat rejoined the administration. A critical goal that was not fulfilled by protesters was the removal of President B?seescu. However, he was removed by parliament 6 months later. In addition, it appears that the government largely handled the movement, making swift efforts to appeal to protestor's political demands while proving ineffectual in addressing their economic and social concerns.

Facing an economic crisis and rising debt at home, Romania turned to the IMF, the World Bank, and the EU in 2009 for \$20 billion in emergency loans. The government, headed by Prime Minister Emil Boc, with the support of President Traian B?seescu, enacted extensive austerity measures to reign in the budget deficit, passing tax increases, spending cuts in public-sector wages and social benefits, and, in March 2011, a new labor code opposed by unions. By 2011, the economy had begun to grow again after years of austerity and difficult reform.

In December 2011, the Boc Government proposed healthcare reforms. The bill would have reduced state funded health benefits, de-regulated the health insurance market, and privatised Romanian hospitals. Dr. Raed Arafat, the health minister, publicly opposed the bill, prompting B?seescu to criticize him on Televiziunea Rom?n? (TVR1) on 21 December, later suggesting on 9 January in a radio talk show that Arafat resign his post.

Arafat resigned the next day. He immediately met with the emergency healthcare service he founded in 1990 to discuss opposition to the bill. This agency, the Mobile Emergency Service for Resuscitation and Extrication (SMURF), coordinated with local fire departments and hospitals to provide complementary emergency care. In 2005, Arafat's project to have SMURF function as an additional emergency service on a county level was passed into law. The organization by 2012 had been marginally incorporated into the local apparatus of some Romanian cities.

On 10 January, Arafat and SMURF organized a meeting in Cluj-Napoca, a town in Northeast Romania. Dozens took to the streets in Union Square in Cluj with placards and signs in solidarity with Arafat and SMURF. Others gathered at University Square in Bucharest. They claimed that SMURF was vital to Romanian healthcare, providing emergency services and transportation. They worried the healthcare bill would increase the cost of healthcare for ordinary Romanians.

On 12 January 2012, 1,500 Romanians gathered in the city of Targu Mures to protest proposed healthcare reforms by the Boc government. Organized in an online Facebook campaign, Arafat-SMURF supporters led a march against the bill. It was the first instance where protesters called for the removal of B?seescu.

Protesters took action in small numbers over the next week, using increasingly anti-government and anti-president language,

waving Romanian flags cut through the middle (the symbol of the 1989 Romanian Revolution), and marching on the presidential palace. On the 15 January, the Iași National Liberal Party (PNL), a youth organization, joined and organized a march in Bucharest. Demonstrators threw bottles, smashed store windows, set newspapers on fire, and threw stones at police. Police dispersed the crowd with tear gas.

On 17 January, Arafat returned to his position at the Ministry of Health after talks with Băsescu and Boc that concluded in the government withdrawing the healthcare bill. Arafat disassociated himself from the protests, and worked within the government to develop a new health law.

Despite Arafat's return, thousands gathered at University Square on the 19th to protest the government, asking for labor reform, and an end to political corruption (Băsescu was briefly suspended in his first term for unconstitutional conduct and corruption in 2007). Police responded in anti-riot gear to clear the streets. Fifty-five were reported arrested, with five injured during the protest. Along with the 15th, these became the most violent days of the protest movement.

The continued protests influenced a series of removals and resignations within the Boc government. On 23 January, Boc dismissed his Foreign Minister Teodor Baconschi in response to protesters, who demanded his removal after Baconschi insulted them in his online blog. Then, on 5 February, Boc resigned in an attempt to quell the protests and promote stability.

Băsescu appointed an interim Prime Minister, Catalin Predoiu, and then replaced Boc with Mihai Razvan Ungureanu, his nomination for Prime Minister. Protests continued, albeit in smaller numbers, in the following months.

In March labor unions, who previously joined the protests as individuals but not en masse, protested prominently. The five major Romanian unions organized to protest against proposed changes to the labor code throughout the month, at Parliament and the Presidential Palace. Although the campaign against healthcare reform had ended, unions picked up the mantle from their fellow protesters to fight against labor reform.

The Romanian government faced increased difficulties in April, when on the 27th the Ungureanu government collapsed in a no-confidence vote by legislators, who disputed Ungureanu's continued austerity measures and declining growth rate. The newly appointed Prime Minister, Victor Ponta, held a referendum to remove President Băsescu in July. Although low voter turnout (forty-eight percent) failed to meet the minimum for impeachment, eighty percent of voters wished to remove Băsescu, confirming his unpopularity. Băsescu's removal was one of the main political demands that was not granted by Romanian protesters in February. However, Băsescu was removed by Parliament on 6 July 2012. Romania's declining economy remains the foremost concern for opponents of the administration.

Research Notes

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