



Romanian Political Scene Reacts to Annulled, Rescheduled Presidential Election

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On 11 March, Romania's Constitutional Court (CCR) upheld the decision of the Central Electoral Office (BEC) to refuse to register the candidacy of anti-Western isolationist Călin Georgescu in the new presidential election scheduled for May. He has received the most votes in the first round of the election last November, which was annulled over violations by his campaign. However, the authorities have not yet provided clear evidence of his links to Russian attempts to influence the results. Until the election is resolved, the duties of the head of state are tasked to the Speaker of the Senate, as President Klaus Iohannis stepped down prematurely on 12 February. This has weakened Romania's voice in international forums at a time when the new U.S. administration is shaping its foreign policy, including relations with Europe.

Georgescu's Registration Denied. The [BEC refused to register Georgescu's candidacy](#), deeming him unfit to fulfil the president's constitutional role as the defender of democracy. It justified this by the CCR decision from December [annulling the election after the first round](#) and ordering a rerun due to what the court cited was the blatant dishonesty of his campaign.

The annulment of the election strengthened Georgescu's popularity, however. Some polls found he would win already in the first round of the new vote. It seems the electorate interpreted the CCR's action as a manipulation of democracy—in an IRES poll at the end of last year, 62% of respondents considered the this decision as "bad". It lent credibility to him as a candidate capable of overturning the establishment, currently the government of a [grand coalition of the Social Democratic Party \(PSD\), the National Liberal Party \(PNL\), and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania](#), which has been in power since 2021, and its patron President Iohannis.

No Conclusive Evidence. The authorities have not provided the public with unequivocal evidence of the violations committed by the Georgescu campaign. The prosecutor's office only brought six charges against him at the end of

February, but the court did not agree to a provisional arrest. The most credible one concerns concealing sources of funding because, according to Georgescu's reports, his campaign was completely cost-free. The charge of promoting the "cult of war criminals", on the other hand, refers to statements about Marshal Ion Antonescu and the leaders of the fascist Legionary Movement (Iron Guard) as heroes, although prosecutors have so far not actively pursued this crime in Romania. The charge of initiating a fascist organisation is based on alleged links with the neo-legionary movements that supported Georgescu's candidacy. The charge of instigating a coup d'état, on the other hand, is based on his links to an alleged attempt at one masterminded by his bodyguards, [former mercenaries fighting in Africa](#).

Probably to demonstrate to Romanians Georgescu's links to Russian interference in the election, the authorities dismantled in early March a grotesque pro-Russian conspiracy headed by a 101-year-old general who supported his candidacy. The authorities, although accusing Georgescu of such links, did not provide details likely to convince the public, pointing to the secrecy of the services' sources. Even declassified reports, on the basis of which CCR annulled the election last December, indicate only vaguely that algorithms

promoting Georgescu's social networks were coordinated by a "state actor". They suggest that this actor was Russia, citing its analogous actions during the elections in Ukraine and [Moldova](#).

Divergent Reactions from Allies. The annulment of the Romanian elections has been heavily criticised by the new U.S. administration. However, the main target of its accusations has not been Romania itself, which is one of the most pro-American states in Europe, but the EU. Vice President J.D. Vance at the Munich Security Conference in February alleged, among other things, that the CCR's decision was made on "flimsy suspicions of an intelligence agency and enormous pressure from its continental neighbours". A few days later, at a meeting of conservative groups, CPAC, Vance questioned the community of values shared by the U.S. and Europe, arguing "you cancel elections because you don't like the result, and that happened in Romania".

Vance's statements may have influenced Romania to allow the departure of the brothers Andrew and Tristan Tate, U.S. and UK citizens and backers of Donald Trump and the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) movement who were detained on charges that include human trafficking and coercion of pornographic recordings. According to the *Financial Times*, Trump's special envoy Richard Grenell appealed to Romanian Foreign Minister Emil Hurezeanu in Munich for their release. Although both sides deny this, just several hours after Georgescu was charged, the prosecutor's office lifted the ban on the Tates leaving Romania, after which they left the country and the U.S. authorities stopped criticising the Romanian election.

Either solidarity or understanding for the actions of the Romanian authorities was expressed by its key European allies. They were unequivocally supported by France, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and the UK, as well as the heads of EU institutions. Russia's interference in the Romanian election was confirmed by NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Innovation, Hybrid, and Cyber James Appathurai, among others. The mechanisms, meanwhile, were described in a February report by the French anti-cyberattack service.

Candidates in the New Election. The exclusion of Georgescu has changed the distribution of forces ahead of the May elections. The favourite in polling is the leader of the nationalist [Alliance for the Union of Romanians George Simion](#), with 29-37% support. He registered his candidacy after the CCR's March decision and is setting himself up as Georgescu's successor, although he only asks his supporters to vote their conscience. Simion is likely to win over only a fraction of them, as the core part of Georgescu's voters saw him primarily as an uncompromisingly anti-system candidate, while they may be put off by Simion's image as a nationalist. Numerous Georgescu voters are likely to shift to [former Prime Minister Victor Ponta](#), currently at 13-23%, who boasts of his contacts with the MAGA movement.

The moderate electorate is likely to be divided between two candidates, so it is possible that neither of them will enter the

second round of voting in May. In view of [the poor results in the elections at the end of last year](#), the grand coalition parties have fielded a common candidate this time, former Senate Speaker Crin Antonescu (14-23%). He will be competing for voters with the non-partisan, liberal Bucharest Mayor Nicușor Dan (17-21%). The latter has won over a significant part of the electorate of Elena Lasconi (4-12%), leader of the Save Romania Union, who is critical of the PSD-PNL duopoly. She had gone through to what would have been the second round of the late 2024 elections, but her support has waned with the CCR's decisions.

Romania without a President. Antonescu's campaign will be facilitated by the resignation of the unpopular Iohannis, who, in an IRES poll in February, 91% of respondents distrust. His unexpected resignation was probably prompted by fear of impeachment. Indeed, the opposition accused him of usurpation of power, as the president's mandate was due to expire on 21 December 2024. The motion for impeachment could have been voted through in the face of the risk that some MPs and senators of the grand coalition who are in conflict with Iohannis would break party discipline.

In Romania, the president is in charge of foreign and security policy, and therefore Iohannis' surprise resignation has weakened its international position, including not being represented in Paris on 17 February at the summit of Ukraine's key European allies. On an interim basis, the duties of head of state are assigned to the Speaker of the Senate, PNL leader Ilie Bolojan, who has no international experience.

Conclusions. The refusal to register Georgescu's candidacy is a consequence of his campaign's malpractice before the annulled elections of late 2024. However, the Romanian authorities have not communicated clear evidence or quickly enough to their own citizens. This has undermined their confidence in the rule of law and democratic institutions in the country. This could foster radical sentiment in what has been an unambiguously pro-Western society. Probably it will also strengthen Romanians' susceptibility to conspiracy theories and disinformation spread by Russia.

The Trump administration's reaction to the annulment of the Romanian elections demonstrates a change in the U.S. approach even towards its most loyal allies. Romania was treated instrumentally, for example, in Vance's confrontation with the EU. The shift away from shared values to transactionalism in U.S. policy is evidenced by the Tate brothers case.

The effectiveness of Romanian foreign policy will be limited until a president is elected in the May elections and sworn in, which may not happen until the summer. The international position of acting head of state Bolojan is weak due to the makeshift nature of his office and his lack of experience. For Poland, this is disadvantageous, as Romania remains its main ally on NATO's Eastern Flank. Meanwhile, closer coordination with it would be particularly welcome at this key moment in the shaping of the Trump administration's European policy and its drive to end the war in Ukraine.