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SPOTLIGHT

Tensions Build in Romania after Leading Candidate Blocked from Presidential Election Re-Run

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On 11 March the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) unanimously maintained the decision of the Central Electoral Office (BEC) from 9 March to refuse to register the candidacy of Călin Georgescu, an anti-system isolationist whose positions undermine Romania's Euro-Atlantic orientation. He was the favourite according to some polls in the presidential rerun election scheduled for 4 May, and he could have won as early as in the first round. This could provoke unfriendly reactions from the Trump administration in the U.S., which has criticised the CCR's verdict in December 2024 nullifying the then-pending presidential election and ignored information about abuses by Georgescu's campaign.

How did the BEC justify its refusal to register Georgescu's candidacy?

The BEC based its decision on the obligation to evaluate registered candidates, not only in terms of formalities but also in their duty to defend democracy as enshrined in the presidential oath in the constitution. In doing so, the BEC also pointed to the [CCR's verdict from 6 December annulling the presidential elections and requiring them to be held again](#), along with the re-registration of candidates. The high court's decision came down after [the first round of voting on 24 November in which Georgescu received the most votes of any candidate \(23%\)](#). The basis for the court's verdict was declassified secret service reports indicating that his campaign was financed by undisclosed sources and included massive manipulation of social media algorithms coordinated with the support of a "state actor", identified by the Romanian authorities as Russia. Although Georgescu was not explicitly banned from running again at that time, according to the BEC the CCR's verdict rendered him permanently unfit for the post.

How did Georgescu's supporters react to the BEC's decision?

The announcement of the decision by the BEC was followed by protests by Georgescu supporters and clashes between them and the gendarmerie in Bucharest. Although Georgescu and the leaders of the nationalist groups supporting him—[George Simion of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians \(AUR\)](#) and [Anamaria Gavrilă of the Party of Young People \(POT\)](#)—have called for peaceful protests, the potential that they will turn into riots in the coming days is high. This is because of [the mood of a large part of the electorate](#) which view the BEC's decision as a triumph of a "parallel state", a popular conspiracy theory in Romania of a supposed alliance of the secret services and the political establishment to manipulate a façade of democracy while preserving their influence. Acts of violence by radicalised individuals may occur because of calls for a response by Horațiu Potra, Georgescu's security chief and previously a mercenary fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He is in hiding in Dubai from Romanian prosecutors who accuse him of, among other things, trying to undermine the country's constitutional order.

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Who will take over Georgescu's electorate in the May elections?

The leaders of AUR and POT have pledged loyalty to Georgescu and make any electoral decisions only with his approval. After confirmation of the BEC's decision by the CCR, Simion and Gavrilă announced they both will run for president and at some point during the campaign one of them will resign and ask their supporters to back the other partner. Probably, the common candidate will be Simion, who in the annulled election was fourth, with 14% of the vote, even though many of his supporters voted for Georgescu. In any case, the challenge for Simion and Gavrilă candidacies would be the approaching 15 March deadline for registration, which requires, among other things, the collection of 200,000 signatures of supporters.

What might be the international implications of the BEC's decision?

Simion appealed to "international friends" for help in the face of the BEC's decision. He is most likely counting on a sharp response from the Trump administration. Such was the tone of Vice President J.D. Vance's speech at this year's Munich Security Conference in which he alleged that the elections in Romania were cancelled due to "flimsy suspicions of an intelligence agency and enormous pressure from its continental neighbours". So far, Simion's appeal has drawn a response only from leaders known for pro-Russian sympathies, Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini and Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, who called on the European Commission to give Georgescu "European protection". Romania's other European allies have not taken a position. However, in previous months, key ones, notably France, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and the United Kingdom, as well as the heads of EU institutions, have declared understanding of the Romanian authorities' decisions, seeing them as countering Russian attempts to interfere in elections.