

Research Briefing

23 December 2024

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# Romania: recent political developments and 2024 elections



## Summary

- 1 Constitution and political developments since the 1990s
- 2 Elections in 2024

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## Summary

The results of the Romanian presidential election at the end of 2024 were annulled following reports of irregularities and interference by a state actor.

## Constitution and political background

Romania has been described as a [semi-presidential republic](#) with the President sharing executive power with the government led by the Prime Minister. [The President takes a leading role in foreign affairs](#) and represents Romania in the European Council (bringing together EU heads of state and government).

Most governments in Romania since 2012 have been led by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) but it has clashed on several occasions with Romania's elected presidents. This includes disagreements with the current president, Klaus Iohannis, [as well as attempts to remove his predecessor from office](#). Iohannis has been in office since 2014 and is associated with the National Liberal Party (PNL), the PSD's main rival in this period.

[Several PSD leaders have faced corruption charges](#). Proposals by the PSD-led government to reduce penalties or decriminalise certain corruption offences in 2017 and reduce the President's role in appointing prosecutors led to [mass protests](#) and criticisms from President Iohannis. In 2018, [the government dismissed the chief anti-corruption prosecutor](#) Laura Kövesi, later appointed to the EU post of European Public Prosecutor.

The government's actions in this period were criticised by the [European Commission](#), which was monitoring Romania under the post-EU accession Co-operation and Verification Mechanism (CVM).

The PSD was out of office from 2019 to 2021 but returned as part of [a grand coalition with the PNL](#) in late 2021. In 2022, parliament adopted new legislation which met commitments under the CVM, leading to a European Commission [recommendation that the monitoring be discontinued](#).

Since the 2020 election, there has been increasing support for [parties described as far right and nationalist](#), including the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) and SOS Romania, which have questioned Romania's membership of the EU and NATO and its support for Ukraine. Increased support for these parties has also been attributed to public anger with corruption, disillusionment with the ruling parties and a desire for alternatives to the PSD and PNL since they formed their grand coalition.

## Presidential election, November 2024

Ahead of the 2024 presidential election, SOS Romania leader Diana Șoșoacă was banned from standing in [the election](#) by the constitutional court, on the grounds that her anti-EU and anti-NATO positions were incompatible with the constitution. Polls ahead of the election indicated that it would result in [a second-round run-off](#) between PSD leader and Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu and AUR leader George Simion. However, in a shock result, an independent candidate previously associated with the AUR, Călin Georgescu, led in [the first round of the election](#) on 24 November 2024. Elena Lasconi, leader of the centre-right anti-corruption Save Romania Union (USR) came second and was scheduled to face Georgescu in the run-off. Ciolacu came third.

Georgescu had lagged well behind several other candidates in the opinion polls but had gained traction through [a social media campaign](#) in the lead-up to the election. Georgescu has taken nationalist, anti-EU and “anti-globalist” stances. Following the first round, he said [he would stop all Romanian political and military support for Ukraine](#) if elected.

On 4 December 2024, intelligence documents were declassified detailing what was described as a [massive and “highly organised” campaign](#) for Georgescu on the TikTok platform which was likely orchestrated by [a “state actor”](#). This was implied to be Russia, though it was not directly blamed.

On 6 December 2024, Romania’s constitutional court annulled [the result of the presidential election](#). It said the irregularities revealed by the intelligence assessment had interfered in the principle of free and fair elections. [Georgescu denounced the decision as a “barbaric act”](#) while Simion described it as a “coup d’etat”. Lasconi also criticised the decision.

## Parliamentary elections, December 2024

In the meantime, [parliamentary elections had been held on 1 December](#). PSD was the lead party with a reduced vote share of 22%. AUR came second with 18% of the vote. Another new party, the Party of Young People (POT), which supported Georgescu in the presidential election, won 6.5% of the vote. The vote of AUR, SOS Romania and POT combined was close to a third of the electorate.

Following the election, PSD together with PNL, USR and the ethnic Hungarian UDMR party discussed forming a pro-EU governing coalition. This was despite PNL saying during the election that [it would not renew its coalition with PSD](#) and USR’s criticisms of both parties. The four parties appeared to have reached [an agreement on 11 December](#), but there were then disagreements between PSD and USR with the latter seeking tighter budgetary commitments.

[The PSD announced it was withdrawing from talks](#) on 19 December, but then returned to talks within a few days with the USR no longer involved. On 23 December, an [agreement was announced on a coalition government](#) involving PSD, PNL and UDMR, with support also from smaller ethnic minority parties. The agreement also involves the governing parties fielding a single presidential candidate for the re-run in 2025.

# 1 Constitution and political developments since the 1990s

## 1.1 Political system

Following the overthrow of the Communist regime in December 1989, a new Parliament was elected in 1990 with the combined legislatures acting as a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution approved by referendum in December 1991.<sup>1</sup>

Under the 1991 Constitution (as amended in 2003), legislative power is vested in the bicameral Parliament, comprising the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house), which has 330 seats, and the Senate (the upper house), which has 134 seats.<sup>2</sup> Parliament is elected by universal adult suffrage using a system of proportional representation and party lists for both chambers. Both chambers are elected for four-year terms.<sup>3</sup>

The President of the Republic is the directly elected head of state, and can serve a maximum of two five-year terms. The presidential election goes to a second round, involving the top two candidates, if no candidate wins a majority of votes in the first round.<sup>4</sup>

Romania has been described as a semi-presidential republic with both the President and the government, headed by the Prime Minister, holding executive power.<sup>5</sup> The President takes a leading role in foreign policy and defence matters and represents Romania in the European Council (bringing together EU heads of state and government).<sup>6</sup>

The President appoints the Prime Minister, who in turn presents a list of ministers which must win a vote of confidence from parliament within ten days, with the two chambers voting in a joint session.<sup>7</sup> The President appoints the government on the basis of this confidence vote.<sup>8</sup> The President can dissolve parliament after 60 days if a government is unable to win a vote of

<sup>1</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Government and Politics](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>2</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, [IPU Parline: Romania](#) [accessed 19 December 2024]

<sup>3</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, Romania: Political structure, 17 October 2017

<sup>4</sup> Constitute Project, [Romania's Constitution of 1991 with Amendments through 2003](#) (PDF), August 2019, Articles 81-82

<sup>5</sup> EU Europa website, [Romania – EU country profile](#) [accessed 10 December 2024]

<sup>6</sup> Ramona Coman, [The Romanian 2024 elections: A test for democracy](#), UK in a changing Europe, 19 December 2024

<sup>7</sup> [Romania's Constitution of 1991 with Amendments through 2003](#) (PDF), Article 103

<sup>8</sup> As above, Article 85



confidence, but parliament can only be dissolved once a year.<sup>9</sup> The President cannot dismiss the Prime Minister, but the government must resign if parliament removes its confidence in the government through a vote of censure.<sup>10</sup>

The President may take part in government meetings in which issues of national interest related to foreign policy, national defence, and public order are discussed, and in other meetings at the request of the Prime Minister.<sup>11</sup> The government ensures the implementation of the domestic and foreign policies of the country and is responsible for the general management of the public administration.<sup>12</sup> Parliament is the sole legislative authority.<sup>13</sup>

The President was previously elected for a four-year term, but the increase to a five-year term was one of the changes made in a constitutional reform approved in a referendum in October 2004. The constitutional reform also introduced changes to prepare Romania for EU membership in 2007.<sup>14</sup>

Romania joined NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2

## Party system and government changes, 1990-2012

After the Communist regime was deposed at the end of 1989, the National Salvation Front (FSN) was originally the dominant force in Romanian politics. It established a provisional government at the end of 1989 and then won Romania's first democratic elections in the post-Communist era in 1990. The FSN candidate, Ion Iliescu, a former Communist party official who was already acting as interim President, was elected President in 1990, and then again under the new constitution in 1992. After losing in the Presidential election to Emil Constantinescu of the centre-right Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) in 1996, Iliescu won the presidency again in 2000.<sup>16</sup>

Iliescu was charged for crimes against humanity in 2019 for his actions in the during the 1989 revolution, when 862 people were killed.<sup>17</sup> These processes have encountered several delays, including appeals and referrals to different courts and are still ongoing.<sup>18</sup> A separate earlier indictment for Iliescu's role in

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<sup>9</sup> As above, Article 80

<sup>10</sup> As above, Articles 107, 110, 113

<sup>11</sup> As above, Article 87

<sup>12</sup> As above, Article 102

<sup>13</sup> As above, Article 61

<sup>14</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Chronology](#) [accessed 19 February 2024]

<sup>15</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Recent History](#)

<sup>16</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile -The Legislative and Presidential Elections of 2000](#) [accessed 10 December 2024]

<sup>17</sup> [Romania's ex-leader Iliescu charged over 1989 uprising](#), Al Jazeera, 8 April 2019

<sup>18</sup> [Romanian High Court judges send 1989 Revolution case back to prosecutors](#), Romania Insider, 26 October 2023

the violent government response to protests in Bucharest in June 1990, when thousands of miners were brought in to help police put down the protestors, was annulled in 2020 but revived in 2024.<sup>19</sup>

The FSN divided in 1992 with Iliescu's faction becoming the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN), and later absorbed other parties to become the Party of Social Democracy of Romania (PDSR). In 2001, PDSR merged with the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSDR) to form the PSD (Social Democratic Party). The PDSR/PSD led the government from 2000 to 2004.<sup>20</sup>

The remainder of FSN became the Democratic Party – Salvation Front (PD-FSN), and joined an alliance of parties that joined a governing coalition led by the centre-right Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) from 1996 to 2000. PD-FSN later shortened its name to the Democratic Party (PD), and then became part of the Democratic Liberal Party (PD-L) in 2008.<sup>21</sup> The PD joined an alliance with the centre-right National Liberal Party (PNL), which formed a coalition government from 2004 to 2007. The PD candidate, Traian Băsescu, also won the Presidential election in 2004 and was re-elected in 2009.

In 2007, PD merged with the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD) which had been formed by a breakaway from the PNL, forming the Democratic Liberal Party (PD-L).<sup>22</sup> This led coalition governments from 2008 to 2012. In 2014, PD-L merged with PNL (with the merged party retaining the PNL name).

The PSD and PNL have subsequently been the two major parties in Romanian elections, with the PNL holding the Presidency of Romania since 2014 and the PSD leading governments from 2012 to 2019, and then returning to government again in 2021 as part of a grand coalition with the PNL.

## 1.3

## Government-President disputes, 2007-2012

Traian Băsescu of the PD defeated Adrian Năstase, the PSD Prime Minister from 2000-2004, in the November 2004 presidential election. In 2012 Năstase, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in 2012 on charges relating to the use of public funds for his 2004 presidential election campaign. Năstase received further prison sentences in 2014 for blackmail and bribery.<sup>23</sup>

In early 2007, Băsescu refused to approve the Prime Minister's nomination to foreign secretary. The Prime Minister, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu of the PNL, accused Băsescu of undermining the government, leading to the PD being

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<sup>19</sup> [Romania's Ex-President Indicted Over 1990 Violence](#), Balkan Insight, 23 December 2016; [Romania's Ex-President Iliescu Grilled Over 'Mineriada Case'](#), Balkan Insight, 26 April 2024; [Ion Iliescu, officially indicted in the Mineriad\\* case](#); Actmedia, 29 April 2024

<sup>20</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>21</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>22</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>23</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

excluded from the governing coalition. A new minority government led by the PNL, also including the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) and supported externally by the PSD was formed in early April 2007. In April 2007, parliament approved a motion initiated by the PSD to suspend Băsescu from office on grounds of unconstitutional conduct, accusing of Băsescu of creating political instability, pressurising the judiciary and interfering in government affairs. A referendum in May 2007 to remove Băsescu from office was however defeated by a large majority and Băsescu was reinstated as President.<sup>24</sup>

Băsescu was reelected as President in December 2009. The PSD and the Conservative Party (PC) challenged the results, citing electoral violations, but this was rejected by the constitutional court.<sup>25</sup>

The PD-L emerged as the largest party in parliamentary elections in 2008, and formed a coalition government along with the PSD and PC. However, the PSD withdrew from the coalition in September 2009. The government resigned in early 2012 following protests against corruption. In May 2012, a new government headed by the leader of PSD, Victor Ponta, took office ahead of an election to be held later in the year.<sup>26</sup>

In July 2012, Parliament voted to suspend President Băsescu from office for 30 days and announced a referendum to get public approval for his impeachment. This was on the grounds that he had exceeded his authority. However, the referendum failed to reach the 50% turn-out validity to be the constitutional court ruled it valid, with Băsescu remaining in office.<sup>27</sup> The attempts to remove Băsescu were also criticised as unacceptable by EU and US officials.<sup>28</sup>

In 2019, Romania's Court of Appeal ruled that Băsescu had collaborated with Romania's secret police during the Communist era.<sup>29</sup> This ruling was confirmed by the High Court of Cassation and Justice in 2022, leading to the loss of benefits and protections usually afforded to ex-presidents.<sup>30</sup>

## 1.4

## PSD governments 2012-2019

### Parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014

The Social Liberal Union (USL) alliance, bringing together PSD, PNL, the Conservative Party (PC) and the National Union for the Progress of Romania

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<sup>24</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>25</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>26</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>27</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>28</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Recent History](#) [accessed 10 December 2024]

<sup>29</sup> Euractiv, [Romanian ex-president Basescu 'worked with communist secret police'](#), 21 September 2019

<sup>30</sup> [Ex-Romanian President Traian Basescu declared collaborator of former secret police Securitate](#), The Romania Journal, 23 March 2022

(UNPR), won a substantial majority in the legislative elections in December 2012, with a new coalition government formed under Victor Ponta following the election. In February 2014, PNL withdrew from the government and was replaced by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR).<sup>31</sup>

Ponta stood in presidential elections in November 2014, leading in the first round with 40.4%, with PNL leader Klaus Iohannis second with 30.4%. However, Iohannis won the second round with 54.4% of the vote.<sup>32</sup>

## Government faces corruption charges

In July 2015, Ponta was charged with several counts of corruption including fraud, tax evasion and money laundering dating back to his time as a lawyer in 2007-08. President Iohannis had called on him to resign, but Ponta remained as Prime Minister while resigning the leadership of the PSD.<sup>33</sup> Liviu Dragnea was elected to replace him as PSD leader, despite having received a suspended sentence earlier in the year on charges of facilitating electoral fraud in relation to the 2012 referendum to impeach President Băsescu. Dragnea had also resigned as a government minister following the sentence.<sup>34</sup> The trial of Ponta began in September 2015 but he remained as Prime Minister. He was later acquitted in May 2018.<sup>35</sup>

Ponta's government resigned in November 2015, following mass demonstrations after the deaths of 32 people in a nightclub. Several officials were charged with causing death by negligence after it emerged that the club was granted a license without approval from the fire department. There were then large-scale anti-corruption protests across the country which called on the government to resign. The President then appointed former European Commissioner Dacian Cioloş to lead a non-party government, which remained in place until legislative elections in December 2016.<sup>36</sup>

The PSD emerged as the largest party in the December 2016 elections and formed a coalition government with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats Party (ALDE), formed by a merger in 2015 of PC and the Liberal Reformist Party. Sorin Mihai Grindeanu of the PSD became Prime Minister. Party leader Dragnea was unable to take up the post because of his conviction in 2015.<sup>37</sup>

## Government attempts to undermine corruption charges

There were further public protests in Bucharest and other cities in January 2017 in response to government plans to grant pardons for certain criminal offences and to decriminalise corruption offences. The protests had the support of President Iohannis. The government adopted the measures by

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<sup>31</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>32</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>33</sup> [Romania PM Victor Ponta charged with corruption](#), BBC News, 13 July 2015

<sup>34</sup> [Romanian Minister Resigns After Fraud Conviction](#), Balkan Insight, 18 May 2015

<sup>35</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>36</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>37</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

emergency decree, decriminalising cases of abuse of office involving less than 200,000 lei (around £35,000), reducing penalties for some corruption offences and allowing criminal sentences to be commuted (which could potentially apply to Dragnea's earlier sentence). Following further protests (reported to be the largest since 1989) and international criticism, the government repealed the decree in February. President Iohannis had also appealed to the constitutional court against the decree, to which the parliament adopted a motion accusing him of "abuse of the law" and attempting to usurp its powers.<sup>38</sup>

In June 2017 the PSD withdrew support from Grindeanu's government on the grounds that it had failed to fulfil the party's governing programme. Grindeanu was excluded from the PSD. A new government was formed under Mihai Tudose, previously Minister of the Economy.<sup>39</sup>

In August 2017 the government announced proposed amendments to justice legislation which would remove the President's power to appoint the Prosecutor-General and the head of Romania's anti-corruption directorate (DNA) and make prosecutors subordinate to the Minister of Justice. This prompted further public protests and condemnation from the President, who later referred the government's reforms to the constitutional court. Large demonstrations were held against the proposed legislation across the country in November.<sup>40</sup> Judicial reforms passed in December also included new sanctions against judges and prosecutors viewed as acting in bad faith.<sup>41</sup>

Tudose resigned as Prime Minister in January 2018, amid continued tensions with Dragnea who still had substantial influence in the ruling party while being barred from holding the office of Prime Minister. Dragnea was reported to be behind the Government's efforts to hamper the anti-corruption investigations and reform the judiciary.<sup>42</sup>

### **Dăncilă becomes Prime Minister, 2018**

Viorica Dăncilă, also of the PSD and supportive of the justice reforms, replaced Tudose as Prime Minister in January 2018. She became Romania's first female Prime Minister.<sup>43</sup>

Also in January 2018, investigations into the conduct of the chief anti-corruption prosecutor Laura Kövesi were announced. Kövesi had previously secured the convictions of several dozen ministers, former ministers and members of parliament.<sup>44</sup> The Justice Minister Tudorel Toader later announced dismissal proceedings against her. Kövesi was supported by President Iohannis. Toader referred the matter to the constitutional court

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<sup>38</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>39</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>40</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>41</sup> Politico, [Romanians stage renewed corruption protests](#), 20 January 2018

<sup>42</sup> Financial Times, [Romania anti-corruption chief hits out at critics](#), 15 February 2018

<sup>43</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>44</sup> Financial Times, [Spectre of corruption heightens EU fears over rule of law in Romania](#), 16 August 2018

which ruled in May 2018 that the President could not prevent the Government from removing Kövesi from her post. She was then dismissed in early July.<sup>45</sup> In March 2019, abuse of office charges were brought against Kövesi, and she was banned from leaving the country for two months. These were viewed as an attempt to prevent her being appointed to the new EU post of European Public Prosecutor.<sup>46</sup> The restrictions on Kövesi's movements were lifted by the Supreme Court in April 2019.<sup>47</sup> She was eventually appointed to the EU post in October 2019.<sup>48</sup>

The Chamber of Deputies adopted controversial changes to Romania's criminal procedure code in June 2018. These included limits to appeal cases which would only be allowed with new evidence, a limit of a year on criminal investigations and limiting the use of incriminating recordings where not strictly related to the case under investigation. This led to more protests, which were intensified in July when the Chamber adopted further amendments which provided for the partial decriminalisation of abuse of office. Opposition parties claimed that these changes would allow PSD officials, including Dragnea, to evade charges. In June, Dragnea had been sentenced by the Supreme Court to three-and-a-half years' imprisonment for abuse of office related to payments for fake jobs at a state agency for party workers.<sup>49</sup> There was a further mass protest in Bucharest in August 2018 to demand the resignation of the Government. This was forcibly dispersed by police. Over 400 people were reported injured in by police using tear gas and water cannon.<sup>50</sup>

In October 2018, a referendum backed by the PSD to establish a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage failed after failing to reach the 30% turn-out threshold to validate it.<sup>51</sup>

The ruling coalition lost its majority in December 2018 after some PSD deputies defected to a new party formed by former Prime Minister Ponta, PRO Romania.<sup>52</sup>

In May 2019, Dragnea was imprisoned after Supreme Court judges upheld the sentence imposed on him in June 2018, rejecting his appeal.<sup>53</sup>

## International criticisms of PSD government

Both the EU and the Council of Europe were highly critical of the justice reforms in 2017. The EU was monitoring Romania under the Co-operation and

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<sup>45</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>46</sup> Politico, [Romania indicts former anti-corruption chief Kövesi: reports](#), 29 March 2019

<sup>47</sup> Financial Times, [Brussels steps up rule-of-law dispute with Poland and Romania](#), 3 April 2019

<sup>48</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>49</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Romanian Party Leader Sentenced On Abuse-Of-Office Charges](#), 21 June 2018

<sup>50</sup> BBC News, [Romania protests: Thousands hold fresh rallies after clashes](#), 11 August 2018

<sup>51</sup> BBC News, [Romania marriage poll: Referendum to ban gay unions fails](#), 8 October 2018

<sup>52</sup> Euronews, [Romania's ruling coalition loses parliamentary majority: what it means](#), 5 December 2018

<sup>53</sup> BBC News, [Romania corruption: PSD chief Liviu Dragnea jailed](#), 27 May 2019

Verification Mechanism (CVM), which both Romania and Bulgaria had to sign up to when they joined the EU in 2007. A European Commission report on progress under the CVM in November 2017 raised concerns about the reforms.<sup>54</sup> The Council of Europe’s anti-corruption body also heavily criticised Romania’s judicial reforms in a report published in April 2018.<sup>55</sup>

In October 2018, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe issued a report stating that the government’s justice legislation undermined the ability of the judiciary system to combat corruption, violence and organised crime. The constitutional court also ruled that many of the amendments to the criminal code were unconstitutional.<sup>56</sup>

In November 2018, the European Commission’s Co-operation and Verification Mechanism progress report for Romania said that recent developments on judicial independence, judicial reform and tackling high-level corruption had “reversed the course of progress” and set out recommendations to remedy the situation. Then Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans said that Romania had “re-opened and backtracked on issues where progress was made over the past 10 years” and it was “essential that Romania gets back on track immediately in the fight against corruption and also ensures an independent judiciary”.<sup>57</sup>

In April 2019, a joint statement was issued by 12 countries, including the USA, Canada, Germany and France, expressing concern about modifications to Romania’s justice system which carried the risk of “slowing the fight against corruption and undermining judicial independence”.<sup>58</sup> On the same day, Timmermans said that the EU needed to see results “urgently” after raising more than 40 areas of rule-of-law concern with Romania.<sup>59</sup>

## 1.5

## PSD loses office, Presidential elections, 2019

At the end of August 2019, ALDE announced its withdrawal from the ruling coalition, saying it had lost confidence in Dăncilă. On 10 October Dăncilă’s Government was removed from office, after losing a vote of no confidence initiated by PNL. Iohannis then appointed PNL leader Ludovic Orban as Prime Minister. Orban formed a new minority Government, mainly comprising PNL members in November.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> [Commission Challenges Bulgaria, Romania on Judicial Reform](#), Balkan Insight, 15 November 2017

<sup>55</sup> Group of States against Corruption, [Ad Hoc Report on Romania \(Rule 34\)](#), Council of Europe, adopted 23 March 2018, published 11 April 2018

<sup>56</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>57</sup> European Commission, [European Commission's progress report on Romania under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism](#), 13 November 2018

<sup>58</sup> Reuters, [Twelve Western nations urge Romania to ditch judicial changes](#), 3 April 2019

<sup>59</sup> Financial Times, [Brussels steps up rule-of-law dispute with Poland and Romania](#), 3 April 2019

<sup>60</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

In the presidential election on 10 November 2019, Iohannis was re-elected, defeating Dăncilă in the second round with 66.1% of the votes cast. Iohannis had also been first-placed in the first round, with 37.8% of the votes, with Dăncilă second on 22.3%.<sup>61</sup>

In February 2020, Orban's government lost a vote of confidence in the Chamber of Deputies. However, his government was then re-proposed and remained in office after winning a vote of confidence in March. Shortly after, a state of emergency was imposed because of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>62</sup>

## Legislative elections, December 2020

In parliamentary elections on 6 December 2020, the PSD was still the largest party with 28.9% of the vote and 110 seats in the lower chamber, but this was a significant decrease in votes share from 2016 when it received 45.5% of the vote. PNL came second with 25.2% of the vote and 93 seats. The USR PLUS alliance bringing together the liberal anti-corruption Save Romania Union (USR), formed in 2016, and the Party of Liberty, Unity and Solidarity (PLUS), founded in 2018 by former Prime Minister Dacian Cioloş, came third on 15.4% of the vote. A newly formed nationalist party, Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR), came fourth with 9.1% of the votes.<sup>63</sup>

## Government instability following election

Following the election, Orban resigned as Prime Minister. Coalition talks led to government being formed bringing together PNL, USR PLUS and UDMR, with Florin Cîţu of PNL as Prime Minister. The government initially focused on measures to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, there was disagreement within the ruling coalition over an investment programme for local authorities, which was criticised by USR PLUS for lack of transparency. Cîţu's dismissed the USR PLUS Minister of Justice after USR PLUS boycotted a government meeting on the funding plan, and USR PLUS then announced its withdrawal from the government. USR PLUS and AUR then tabled a motion of confidence which brought down the government in October 2021. The President then nominated former Prime Minister Cioloş to lead the government, but his proposed government failed to secure parliamentary approval.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>62</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>63</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>64</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]



## 1.6

## Grand PSD-PNL coalition, 2021-2024

**PSD returns to government**

After further negotiations, a new grand coalition was formed involving PNL, PSD and UDMR. The new government was approved by Parliament on 25 November 2021. This was headed by former PNL Defence Minister, Nicolae Ciucă, a retired general. Former Prime Minister Grindeanu of PSD became Deputy Prime Minister.<sup>65</sup>

President Iohannis's role in overseeing the coalition talks caused surprise to some observers, given his disputes with the PSD government prior to 2019 and his presidential campaign on 2019 which was fought on a vehement anti-PSD platform. He had refused to debate his PSD rival during the campaign. Opinion polls since the formation of the PNL-PSD coalition in 2021 indicated a decline in the President's popularity.<sup>66</sup>

The grand coalition was initially focused on addressing the Covid-19 pandemic and also negotiating with the EU on the terms of Romania's tranche of the EU's post-covid recovery fund. After February 2022, it was also required to address the impact of Russia's war on Ukraine (see below).<sup>67</sup>

The government adopted revised draft laws on the judiciary in August 2022, which were intended to meet commitments under the EU's Co-operation and Verification Mechanism. These were approved by parliament in October 2022 and enacted by the President in November 2022.<sup>68</sup> In the same month, the European Commission recommended the EU's monitoring of Romania's justice system under the Co-operation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) could be discontinued.<sup>69</sup>

**Ciucă replaced as Prime Minister by Marcel Ciolacu**

Ciucă resigned as Prime Minister in June 2023, honouring a deal with the PSD to rotate the post.<sup>70</sup> He was replaced as Prime Minister by Marcel Ciolacu of the PSD. UDMR left the government. This followed a disagreement over allocation of government posts. An analysis by the German centre-right Konrad Adenauer Institute suggests the UDMR was pushed out by the other two parties and this may have related to a failure by UDMR to distance themselves from nationalist outbursts made by Hungarian Prime Minister

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<sup>65</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>66</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Recent History](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>67</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>68</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>69</sup> European Commission, [Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Progress in Romania under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism](#), COM(2022) 664 final, 22 November 2022; Europa World, [Romania: Recent History](#) [19 February 2024]

<sup>70</sup> Reuters, [Romanian Prime Minister Ciucă resigns in power swap agreed by ruling coalition](#), 12 June 2023

Viktor Orbán against Romania, and a response to the growth of the nationalist Romanian AUR party.<sup>71</sup>

Ciolacu has led the PSD since 2020 and has pledged to turn it into a modern European centre-left party. According to the Konrad Adenauer Institute, the PSD under the leadership of Marcel Ciolacu has ceased its “attacks on the judiciary” though “clientelism and nepotism are still widespread in the party”.<sup>72</sup>

Later in June 2023, Romania’s parliament passed legislation to reform the ‘special pensions’ system and limit pensions received by special categories of state employees, including magistrates and military personnel. This was required to meet conditions set by the European Commission for the release of EU post-covid recovery funding.<sup>73</sup> The Commission froze some payments to Romania under the recovery programme earlier in June, setting Romania a six-month deadline to meet certain milestones. These also related to work on energy investments.<sup>74</sup> The Commission approved a revised version of Romania’s recovery plan in November 2023. This will involve Romania receiving €28.5 billion in funding over seven years, comprising €14.9 billion in loans and €13.6 billion in grants.<sup>75</sup>

## 1.7

## Response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Romania has been aligned with EU sanctions against Ukraine and has condemned Russia’s actions repeatedly.<sup>76</sup> Romania and Ukraine share a land border, with large numbers fleeing Ukraine via Romania since the invasion. Over 3.5 million Ukrainians fled via Romania, with most moving on to other countries.<sup>77</sup> 180,000 Ukrainians had been granted temporary protection in Romania as of 1 October 2024.<sup>78</sup>

Romania has focused its activities on providing humanitarian aid both to Ukraine and Moldova. In March 2023, an EU logistics hub was established near Suceava (a Romanian town close to the border with both Ukraine and

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<sup>71</sup> Konrad Adenauer Institute, [Changing of the guard in Romania: Ciucă leaves, Ciolacu comes](#) (PDF), Romania Country Report, June 2023

<sup>72</sup> Konrad Adenauer Institute, [Changing of the guard in Romania: Ciucă leaves, Ciolacu comes](#) (PDF), Romania Country Report, June 2023

<sup>73</sup> Euractiv, [Romanian parliament passes watered-down special pensions reform](#), 29 June 2023

<sup>74</sup> Euractiv, [EU Commission freezes part of Romanian EU recovery funds](#), 28 June 2023

<sup>75</sup> Euractiv, [EU Commission approves new version of Romania’s recovery plan](#), 22 November 2023. See also European Commission, [Romania’s recovery and resilience plan](#) [accessed 19 February 2024]

<sup>76</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Extremely cautious, Romania’s approach to the Russian invasion of Ukraine](#), 14 October 2022

<sup>77</sup> Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, [Romania: Political and Social Impact One Year After the Start of Russia’s War of Aggression against Ukraine](#), 28 February 2023

<sup>78</sup> UNHCR, [Ukraine Refugee Situation: Romania](#) [accessed 13 December 2024]

Moldova) to distribute and coordinate support for Ukraine and neighbouring countries.<sup>79</sup>

In September 2023, Romania began building air-raid shelters near the border with Ukraine. This came after the Romanian authorities said that debris from Russian drones had been found on Romanian territory.<sup>80</sup>

Data from the Kiel Institute for World Economy Ukraine support tracker (data up to early December 2024) shows that Romania had provided €1.12 billion in aid to Ukraine (ranked 18<sup>th</sup> globally). This included €0.99 billion in military aid. Romania however also spent an additional €3.7 billion in hosting refugees.<sup>81</sup>

## Military support

On 27 February 2022, Romania announced it would send provisions and equipment worth €3 million to Ukraine and offered to care for the wounded in military and civilian hospitals. This included ammunition and other military equipment.<sup>82</sup> However, there was initial caution from Romania in providing military aid to Ukraine.<sup>83</sup>

In March 2022, NATO established a new battlegroup in Romania. This involves troops from Belgium, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal and the United States with France acting as the “framework nation”.<sup>84</sup>

In February 2024, President Iohannis confirmed that Romania had allowed the deployment of high-readiness NATO rapid deployment forces on Romanian territory in 2024. NATO could therefore opt to deploy very rapid joint task forces on Romanian soil in the event of a sudden serious security crisis threatening the country’s national independence and sovereignty “to address the crisis promptly and prevent its escalation”. Prior approval for its deployment or transit through the country would however be required.<sup>85</sup>

Romania’s military support for Ukraine has increased since 2023.<sup>86</sup> In April 2023, the first Black Sea Security Conference was hosted in Bucharest. This was a joint Romanian-Ukrainian initiative, and involved a trilateral meeting between the defence and foreign ministers of Romania, Ukraine and Moldova. This resulted in the signature of agreements on political, security and economic cooperation between the three countries.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Extremely cautious. Romania’s approach to the Russian invasion of Ukraine](#), 14 October 2022

<sup>80</sup> Euronews, [Romania builds bomb shelters close to Ukrainian border](#), 13 September 2023

<sup>81</sup> Kiel Institute, [Ukraine Support Tracker](#) [accessed 19 February 2024]

<sup>82</sup> “[Romania to send fuel, ammunition to Ukraine](#)”, Reuters, 27 February 2022.

<sup>83</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Extremely cautious. Romania’s approach to the Russian invasion of Ukraine](#), 14 October 2022

<sup>84</sup> NATO, [NATO’s military presence in the east of the Alliance](#), 8 December 2023

<sup>85</sup> Euractiv, [Romania allows rapid NATO deployment in case of highly serious threats](#), 9 February 2024

<sup>86</sup> See also

<sup>87</sup> AP News, [Ukraine, Romania, Moldova boost ties at security meeting](#), 13 April 2023

In June 2023, President Iohannis issued a joint statement with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, which rejected Russia's claims on Ukraine and confirmed Romania's support for Ukraine's accession to NATO. It stated that:

Romania will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes. It will continue to provide multidimensional support to Ukraine and to call for strengthening the international support and assistance for Ukraine. Romania will support Ukraine in the post-war reconstruction and recovery aimed at a stable, safe and resilient country.<sup>88</sup>

In July 2024, Romania announced along with the USA, Germany, Netherlands and Italy that it would contribute to further air defence capabilities for Ukraine. This included provision of additional Patriot batteries by Romania.<sup>89</sup> Romania is also acting as a transit country for military equipment and supplies from allies and has been assisting in training Ukrainian forces, including offering its military bases for instructors from allied countries.<sup>90</sup>

Romania has also signed the G7 Joint Declaration setting out long term security guarantees to Ukraine and a bilateral agreement with Ukraine on security cooperation was concluded in July 2024.<sup>91</sup>

## Support for Moldova

Romania has given support to Moldova's application to join the EU (submitted in March 2022) and has provided increased support for Moldova since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This has included increased financial aid and fuel delivery, including through a new gas pipeline since December 2022 and the development of further transport infrastructure and a new border crossing point. Trade between the two countries has also increased.<sup>92</sup>

## Domestic impact

### Political opposition

There have been some disagreements within the Romanian government, but they have been resolved in favour of those taking a tougher line on Russia's actions. For example, in October 2022, the PSD defence minister Vasile Dîncu resigned, citing difficulties working with President Iohannis. This came after the President rebuked Dîncu for suggesting that there was a need for

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<sup>88</sup> President of Ukraine, [Joint Declaration of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy and President of Romania Klaus Werner Iohannis on the Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine](#), 1 June 2023

<sup>89</sup> The White House, [Joint Statement](#), 9 July 2024

<sup>90</sup> ["Intel leak: Romania plays 'key role' in the war in Ukraine"](#), The European Conservative, 16 April 2023

<sup>91</sup> President of Romania, [Agreement on security cooperation between Romania and Ukraine](#), 11 July 2024; Kyiv Independent, [Zelensky: 12 countries join G7's 'security guarantees' declaration for Ukraine](#), 3 August 2023; [From Neighbors To Power Partners: Romania's Deepening Ties With Ukraine](#), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 22 October 2024

<sup>92</sup> China-CEE Institute, [Romania external relations briefing: A new leadership at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), 24 July 2023

international negotiations with Russia and an acceptance that Ukraine would potentially need to cede territory in order to end the war in Ukraine.<sup>93</sup>

Far-right and nationalist groups including AUR and SOS Romania, have been more sympathetic to Russia and have been critical of Ukraine, citing long-standing concerns about the status of the Romanian minority in Ukraine.<sup>94</sup> The impact of high energy prices and subsequent inflation on the cost of living, and concerns about being dragged into a war with Russia, particularly if Russia attacked Moldova, also contributed to increasing scepticism in parts of the population about Romanian support for Ukraine.<sup>95</sup>

### Farmers' protests

Farmers in Romania have protested about the impact of agricultural imports from Ukraine. They have complained about unfair competition since the EU lifted restrictions on Ukrainian goods in the wake of the Russian invasion.<sup>96</sup>

In April 2023, farmers protested across Romania at the inflow of large amount of agricultural products from Ukraine, which had a severe impact on Romania's agricultural sector.<sup>97</sup> Protests by farmers continued into 2024. Hauliers also joined the protests, which also focused on the high cost of fuel and insurance, and the impact of EU environmental measures.<sup>98</sup> Protestors also blocked border crossings with Ukraine in January 2024.<sup>99</sup> In February the government and representatives of the protesters signed a negotiated agreement involving concessions including increased fuel subsidies.<sup>100</sup>

## 1.8

## Agreement to join Schengen area

Romania, along with Bulgaria, will fully join the border-free EU Schengen area on 1 January 2025. This followed the decision of the Council of the EU (EU Member State Ministers) on 12 December 2024 to remove checks on persons at Romania's land borders with other [Schengen area](#) members on 1 January.<sup>101</sup> The process for these two countries joining Schengen had been

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<sup>93</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>94</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Amid Talk Of Ukraine Fatigue, Zelenskiy Seemingly Snubbed By Romanian Parliament](#), 12 October 2023

<sup>95</sup> [Romania's Iohannis at odds with army chief over Russian war escalation](#), Euractiv, 23 May 2024; [The impact in Romania of Russia's war against Ukraine will most likely be measured at the European election](#), European Data News Hub, 9 October 2024; Europa World, [Romania: Recent History](#) [accessed 13 December 2024];

<sup>96</sup> Euronews, [Romania: Protests continue over taxes, subsidies and Ukraine competition](#), 15 January 2024

<sup>97</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 16 February 2024]

<sup>98</sup> Reuters, [Romanian farmers, hauliers ramp up protests, block Ukraine border access](#), 17 January 2024

<sup>99</sup> Euractiv, [Truck drivers, farmers protest in Romania, block border with Ukraine](#), 15 January 2024

<sup>100</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Profile](#) [accessed 13 December 2024]

<sup>101</sup> Council of EU, [Schengen: Council decides to lift land border controls with Bulgaria and Romania](#), 12 December 2024

lengthy, with Austria and Netherlands blocking their membership in 2022 despite European Commission recommendation for them to join because of concerns about their capacity to prevent irregular migration coming via the two countries.<sup>102</sup>

After Austria continued to block membership for Bulgaria and Romania in December 2023 a compromise was agreed in December 2023 enabling Bulgaria and Romania to partially join Schengen.<sup>103</sup> Controls on sea and air borders from Romania were lifted in March 2024, with discussions taking place during the year on lifting control at land borders and Austria lifting its veto in November 2024.<sup>104</sup> However, the November agreement involved a compromise allowing checks to continue at Romania's borders with both Bulgaria and Hungary for at least six months in order to mitigate "potential changes in migratory patterns" following the lifting of controls.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> European Commission, [Making Schengen stronger: Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia are ready to fully participate in the Schengen area](#), 16 November 2022; [Schengen: No EU border-free zone for Romania and Bulgaria](#), BBC News, 8 December 2022

<sup>103</sup> Euronews, [Romania, Bulgaria to partially enter Schengen after striking deal with Austria](#), 28 December 2023

<sup>104</sup> European Commission, [Bulgaria and Romania to join Schengen area starting with air and sea borders: Commission welcomes landmark Council decision Schengen area](#), 30 December 2023; [Austria lifts long-held veto on the Schengen accession of Romania and Bulgaria](#), Euronews, 22 November 2024

<sup>105</sup> [Romania and Bulgaria are granted full Schengen membership, with one caveat](#), Euronews, 12 December 2024; [Romania and Bulgaria to fully join Schengen Area in 2025](#), Euractiv, 12 December 2024

## 2 Elections in 2024

Both parliamentary and presidential elections were due at the end of 2024. President Iohannis would have served two terms and would not be able to stand again.

Opinion polls at the end of 2023 indicated that the PSD and PNL combined would lose their majority, while the nationalist AUR vote would more than double its vote after winning 9.1% of the vote in 2019.<sup>106</sup>

### 2.1 European Parliament elections, June 2024

The European Parliament elections in June 2024 provided an early indication of the likely electoral strength of Romania's leading political parties.

The PSD, which is part of the main centre-left Socialist and Democrats (S&D) group in the European Parliament, and PNL, part of the main centre-right European People's Party (EPP) group, ran together as a joint list in the election. Announcing the list, Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu stated that this was primarily "to protect Romania against extremism" and provide stability, notably with regard to the rise of the AUR and the newer SOS Romania party, both of which had been labelled as "far right" parties.<sup>107</sup>

#### Rise of AUR and SOS Romania

##### AUR

The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) was founded in 2019, promoting national identity and Romania's reunification with Moldova (which is majority ethnic-Romanian).<sup>108</sup> It states that it stands for "family, nation, faith, and freedom".<sup>109</sup>

AUR's leader George Simion was previously involved in a movement to promote reunification and other nationalist positions, and is banned from

<sup>106</sup> [Romania is facing crucial elections in 2024 - will the country put the rising far-right in power](#), Euronews, 28 November 2023

<sup>107</sup> [Romania's joint list for the European elections: Strategic move or threat to democracy?](#), The Parliament magazine, 18 April 2024; [Romania Political Briefing: The 2024 European Parliament Elections in Romania - China-CEE Institute](#), Weekly Briefing, Vol. 75. No. 1 (RO) July 2024

<sup>108</sup> Euronews, [Romania is facing crucial elections in 2024 - will the country put the rising far-right in power](#), 28 November 2023; PolitPro, [Romania: Political parties at a glance](#) [accessed 17 December 2024]

<sup>109</sup> [Romania election preview: who is running for president?](#), Euronews, 22 November 2024

entering Moldova and Ukraine for security reasons.<sup>110</sup> Romanian governments have promoted closer cultural and economic ties with Moldova but have not supported unification.<sup>111</sup>

AUR increased its popularity after 2020 through an anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown stance. It also presented itself as an anti-corruption and anti-establishment party and in favour of traditional family values, opposing same-sex marriage.<sup>112</sup> In December 2021, a large group of AUR supporters tried to force their way into parliament, damaging vehicles.<sup>113</sup> AUR has also been more sympathetic to Russia and critical of Ukraine, citing concerns about the status of the Romanian minority in Ukraine.<sup>114</sup> It does not advocate for withdrawal from either NATO or the EU. However, it engages in “anti-Western” rhetoric and opposes moves to greater supranationalism in the EU and is critical of the EU’s promotion of “progressive” ideas for example on LGBT+ rights.<sup>115</sup>

### SOS Romania

SOS Romania was founded in 2021 and promotes [irredentist positions](#), including annexation of Ukrainian territories that once belonged to Romania and a union with Moldova. It has adopted more openly pro-Russia positions and has been critical of NATO. It has also called on Romania to withdraw from the EU.<sup>116</sup> Its leader Diana Șoșoacă was a leading figure in the anti-vaccination movement during the covid-19 pandemic. She had been a Senator for AUR but was expelled in 2021 for refusing to follow the party line and taking more extreme positions.<sup>117</sup>

## Results

The PSD-PNL list receiving 48.5% of the vote in the election, a decline compared to the combined 54.1% they received in the 2020 national parliamentary election. The AUR came second with 14.9% of the vote, electing MEPs to the European Parliament for the first time. The United Right Alliance,

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<sup>110</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [A shift further to the right. Radical parties are gaining popularity in Romania](#), 29 April 2024; [Romania election preview: who is running for president?](#), Euronews, 22 November 2024; [Romania votes in presidential poll with nationalist and leftist vying for runoff](#), The Guardian, 24 November 2024

<sup>111</sup> Europa World, [Romania. Profile: Regional relations](#) [accessed 19 February 2024]

<sup>112</sup> Euronews, [Romania is facing crucial elections in 2024 - will the country put the rising far-right in power](#), 28 November 2023

<sup>113</sup> Europa World, [Romania: Recent History](#) [accessed 13 December 2024]

<sup>114</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [Amid Talk Of Ukraine Fatigue, Zelenskiy Seemingly Snubbed By Romanian Parliament](#), 12 October 2023; Europa World, [Romania: Recent History](#) [accessed 12 December 2024]

<sup>115</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [A shift further to the right. Radical parties are gaining popularity in Romania](#), 29 April 2024

<sup>116</sup> Euractiv, [Romanian far-right party entering EU parliament for the first time eyes ID](#), 12 June 2024; [Romania Political Briefing: The 2024 European Parliament Elections in Romania – China-CEE Institute](#), Weekly Briefing, Vol. 75. No. 1 (RO) July 2024; PolitPro, [Romania: Political parties at a glance](#) [accessed 17 December 2024]

<sup>117</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [A shift further to the right. Radical parties are gaining popularity in Romania](#), 29 April 2024



bringing together USR, Force of the Right (founded by former Prime Minister Ludovic Orban in 2021) and the People's Movement Party (founded by supporters of former President Băsescu in 2013), came third with 8.7% of the vote. The ethnic-Hungarian UDMR came fourth with 6.5% of the vote. Another new party, SOS Romania, viewed as further to the right than AUR and supportive of Russia, came fifth with 5% of the vote.<sup>118</sup>

The AUR's six MEPs joined the European Conservative and Reformists (ECR) group in the European Parliament, which also includes Giorgia Meloni's governing Brothers of Italy (FDI) party and the Law and Justice Party (PiS) which had been in power in Poland from 2015 to 2023. Hungary's ruling Fidesz party had reportedly been considering joining this group, but the leader of the Fidesz group in the Hungarian parliament said that there was "no way" that his party could sit in the same group as AUR given its "extremist anti-Hungarian" stance.<sup>119</sup>

SOS Romania's two MEPs were reportedly rejected as a potential member of the new European of Sovereign Nations (ESN) in the European Parliament, the new political group established by the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party and considered to be the furthest to the right in the European Parliament. Some members of the ESN group were reportedly concerned about SOS Romania's desire to create a "greater Romania" involving territories from other countries.<sup>120</sup>

SOS Romania leader Diana Șoșoacă was among its two MEPs in the new European Parliament. During the first plenary session of the new European Parliament from 16 to 19 July 2024, Șoșoacă offered to summon a priest to sanctify the European Parliament and cleanse it of "devils". She was later ejected from the session for repeated heckling, and shouted "You kill Romanians!" as she was escorted out while placing a dog's muzzle on her face.<sup>121</sup>

## 2.2 Presidential election

The first round of the presidential election was held on 24 November 2024. The election was expected to go to a second-round run-off on 8 December, with none of the 13 candidates standing expected to win an outright majority.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> European Parliament, [2024 European election results](#) [accessed 16 December 2024]

<sup>119</sup> Hungary Today, [Extremists in the ECR: Snub by our Allies or the Failure of Diplomacy?](#), 20 June 2024; EU News, [Orbán does not like the entry of Romanian nationalists into the ECR](#), 20 June 2024

<sup>120</sup> Euronews, [AfD and allies form new far-right group in Brussels called Europe of Sovereign Nations](#), 10 July 2024

<sup>121</sup> [Far-right MEP vows to have priest rid European Parliament of 'devils'](#), Politico, 17 July 2024; [Romanian Member Escorted Out Of European Parliament For Heckling](#), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 18 July 2024

<sup>122</sup> [Romania election preview: who is running for president?](#), Euronews, 22 November 2024

## Şoşoacă barred from standing

On 5 October, the constitutional court barred SOS Romania leader Diana Şoşoacă from standing in the election, later stating that this was because her public opinions made her unable to uphold the presidential vow to respect the constitution and protect democracy if she be elected. It cited in particular her calls to withdraw Romania from EU and NATO membership, which were fundamental constitutional principles.<sup>123</sup> The ruling was however opposed across the political spectrum including within the ruling coalition and from civil rights groups who warned of a “turn towards illiberalism”.<sup>124</sup> Şoşoacă herself said that the ruling had been engineered by Israel, the USA, NATO and the EU.<sup>125</sup>

PNL leader Nicolae Ciucă accused the PSD of influencing the court's decision. The ruling was backed by a majority of five out of nine judges, with four of the five judges being PSD-appointed and the other by UDMR. Ciucă said PNL's coalition would end, accusing the PSD of having “abuse of power in its DNA”.<sup>126</sup> According to some reports, Ciucă believed the PSD were seeking to improve the chances of AUR leader Simion reaching a run-off against Ciolacu which Ciolacu would have a better chance of winning than against other candidates.<sup>127</sup>

USR leader Elena Lasconi invited the PNL to back a motion of censure to bring down the government. But Ciucă said PNL would remain in government “to prevent the complete escalation of abuses [the PSD] could make to win elections”.<sup>128</sup>

## Leading candidates in opinion polls

The leading candidates in the election included Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu of the PSD and AUR leader George Simion who were expected to face each

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<sup>123</sup> [Romania's top court says it barred presidential candidate over pro-Russian views](#), Reuters, 8 October 2024; [Top Romanian Court Bans Pro-Russian Candidate From Presidential Race](#), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 8 October 2024

<sup>124</sup> [Romania's top court says it barred presidential candidate over pro-Russian views](#), Reuters, 8 October 2024; [Unprecedented 'Putin-style' top court ruling rocks Romanian election](#), Politico, 15 October 2024

<sup>125</sup> [The Far-Right Firebrand Too Dangerous To Run For Romania's Presidency](#), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 21 November 2024

<sup>126</sup> [PNL Breaks Coalition with PSD but Stays in Government](#), The Romania Journal, 8 October 2024

<sup>127</sup> Corinne Deloy, [The ruling Social Democrats are favourites in Romania's parliamentary and presidential elections](#), Fondation Robert Schuman, 12 November 2024; Alexandru Damian, [The annulment of Romania's presidential election reflects both foreign meddling and domestic failures](#), LSE Euorpp blog, 13 December 2024

<sup>128</sup> [Romania's top court says it barred presidential candidate over pro-Russian views](#), Reuters, 8 October 2024

other in a second-round run-off.<sup>129</sup> An opinion poll published on 14 November, indicated that Ciolacu was polling at 25.3%, followed by Simion on 19.1%.<sup>130</sup>

An earlier poll in September suggested that former NATO deputy secretary general and independent candidate Mircea Geoană and Ciolacu would be the top two candidates in the first round, with Geoană winning in the run-off. The September poll put USR leader Lasconi in third place, with Şoşoacă fourth and Simion fifth.<sup>131</sup> Simion appeared likely to benefit from the decision to bar Şoşoacă, with her supporters switching to him.<sup>132</sup>

Ciolacu said he had a “clear plan for a more developed Romania ... based on economic growth on investments and a plan for a more respected and influential Romania abroad”.<sup>133</sup> He also said he wanted to convince Romanians that it is worth staying at home or returning” to Romania.<sup>134</sup> However, he referred to “extremists” in Romania challenging its place in the EU and NATO and said they needed to be “politically isolated”.<sup>135</sup>

In the run-up to the election, Simion denied allegations that he had links to the Russian intelligence services.<sup>136</sup> He said he was not pro-Russian and said he condemned Russian aggression in Ukraine, also denouncing President Putin as a war criminal. However, he said he wanted to stop military aid to Ukraine.<sup>137</sup> He expressed support for US President-Elect Donald Trump, describing AUR as a “Trumpist” party and said he hoped Trump could reach a peace deal in Ukraine.<sup>138</sup> While supporting Romania’s membership of the EU, he also condemned what he described as a “greedy, corrupt bubble” in Brussels.<sup>139</sup> He also said he “would be a liar to say we would respect EU law”.<sup>140</sup>

USR leader Lasconi, who was also standing in the election, denounced Simion as an “extremist”.<sup>141</sup> She presented corruption as one of the biggest problems facing Romania and pledged increased defence spending and continued aid to Ukraine.<sup>142</sup> Lasconi was polling in third place according to the 14 November

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<sup>129</sup> [Romania votes in presidential poll with nationalist and leftist vying for runoff](#), The Guardian, 24 November 2024

<sup>130</sup> [Romania's leftist PM and far-right leader ahead in presidential election, poll shows](#), Reuters, 14 November 2024

<sup>131</sup> Inscop Research, [Sondaj de opinie național – Septembrie 2024](#) (PDF), September 2024

<sup>132</sup> [Unprecedented 'Putin-style' top court ruling rocks Romanian election](#), Politico, 15 October 2024; [The Far-Right Firebrand Too Dangerous To Run For Romania's Presidency](#), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 21 November 2024

<sup>133</sup> [Romania election preview: who is running for president?](#), Euronews, 22 November 2024

<sup>134</sup> [Romania votes in presidential poll with nationalist and leftist vying for runoff](#), The Guardian, 24 November 2024

<sup>135</sup> [Romania election preview: who is running for president?](#), Euronews, 22 November 2024

<sup>136</sup> [Romania election preview: who is running for president?](#), Euronews, 22 November 2024

<sup>137</sup> [Romania's radical right leader Simion, a Trump fan, eyes presidency](#), Reuters, 21 November 2024

<sup>138</sup> [Romanian hard-right chief pitches himself as Europe's next Meloni](#), Politico, 23 November 2024

<sup>139</sup> [Romania's radical right leader Simion, a Trump fan, eyes presidency](#), Reuters, 21 November 2024

<sup>140</sup> [Romanian hard-right chief pitches himself as Europe's next Meloni](#), Politico, 23 November 2024

<sup>141</sup> [Romanian hard-right chief pitches himself as Europe's next Meloni](#), Politico, 23 November 2024

<sup>142</sup> [Romania votes in presidential poll with nationalist and leftist vying for runoff](#), The Guardian, 24 November 2024

poll, with former NATO deputy secretary general Geoană fourth, and PNL leader and former Prime Minister Ciucă in fifth.<sup>143</sup>

## First round result: shock lead for Georgescu

The first round of the election on 24 November delivered a shock result with an independent candidate, Călin Georgescu, coming first with 22.9% of the vote. Lasconi was second with 19.2% and Ciolacu third with 19.1%. Simion was fourth with 13.9%, followed by Ciucă (8.8%) and Geoană (6.3%).<sup>144</sup>

The result came as a major surprise given that Georgescu had not figured highly in earlier opinion polls or featured prominently in international coverage of the election campaign. The opinion poll on 14 November had placed him in sixth place with 5.4% of the vote.<sup>145</sup>

**Table 1 Romania Presidential election, First Round, 24 November 2024**

	Votes	Vote Share
Călin Georgescu (Independent)	2.120.401	22,94 %
Elena-Valerica Lasconi (USR)	1.772.500	19,17 %
Ion-Marcel Ciolacu (PSD)	1.769.760	19,14 %
George-Nicolae Simion (AUR)	1.281.325	13,86 %
Nicolae-Ionel Ciucă (PNL)	811.952	8,78 %
Mircea-Dan Geoană (Independent)	583.898	6,31 %
Hunor Kelemen (UDMR)	416.353	4,50 %
Cristian Diaconescu (Independent)	286.842	3,10 %
Cristian-Vasile Terheș (Romanian National Conservative Party)	95.782	1,03 %
Ana Birchall (Independent)	42.853	0,46 %
Ludovic Orban (Force of the Right)	20.089	0,21 %
Sebastian-Constantin Popescu (New Romania Party)	14.683	0,15 %
Alexandra-Beatrice Bertalan-Păcuraru (Alternative for National Dignity)	14.502	0,15 %
Silviu Predoiu (National Action League Party)	11.246	0,12 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9.242.186</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Permanent Electoral Authority, Romania, [Alegeri prezidențiale - Tur 1, 24 Noiembrie 2024: Prezentă la vot](#) [accessed 19 December 2024]

<sup>143</sup> Inscop Research, [Barometrul Libertatea - Inscop. Sondaj național realizat de Inscop Research la comanda cotidianului Libertatea 7-12 noiembrie](#) (PDF), 14 November 2024

<sup>144</sup> Permanent Electoral Authority, Romania, [Alegeri prezidențiale - Tur 1, 24 Noiembrie 2024: Prezentă la vot](#) [accessed 19 December 2024]

<sup>145</sup> Inscop Research, [Barometrul Libertatea - Inscop. Sondaj național realizat de Inscop Research la comanda cotidianului Libertatea 7-12 noiembrie](#) (PDF), 14 November 2024

On 28 November, Romania's constitutional court ordered a recount of the vote. Though not fully completed, the recount confirmed the order of voter preference for the candidates and the voting figures were validated by the constitutional court on 2 December.<sup>146</sup> It said the decision was final.<sup>147</sup>

### Călin Georgescu: background and political positions

Georgescu had run as an independent candidate but had previously been honorary chairman of the AUR which had proposed him as its prime ministerial candidate in 2020 and 2021.<sup>148</sup> Georgescu is a university professor and had previously work for Romania's environment ministry and represented it on a United Nations environmental programme committee.<sup>149</sup>

Georgescu was not previously widely known but had gained wider recognition in the lead-up to the election through an intensive social media campaign, particularly on the TikTok platform. Georgescu performed particularly well in the election among Romanians living abroad, winning 43% of the diaspora vote.<sup>150</sup>

Georgescu has taken nationalist, anti-EU and "anti-globalist" stances, describing the EU as a "failed project", and claiming that the war in Ukraine is "fought in the interests of American weapon manufacturers". He previously claimed that Marshal Ion Antonescu (leader of fascist Romania during World War II) and Corneliu Codreanu (founder of the fascist Iron Guard) are national heroes.<sup>151</sup> He has described the overthrowing of the Communist regime in 1989 as a coup d'état which was used by the West to steal Romania's resources and says that Romania is now enslaved by the West.<sup>152</sup> He has also claimed that covid-19 does not exist and that no humans have ever been to the moon.<sup>153</sup>

Georgescu has expressed admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and questioned Romania's support for

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<sup>146</sup> Csongor Kuti, [On Means and Ends –The Annulment of the Romanian Presidential Elections](#), Verfassungsblog, 10 December 2024

<sup>147</sup> [Romanian court orders recount of the 1st round of the presidential vote, won by a far-right outsider](#), AP News, 28 November 2024; [Romanian constitutional court validates first round of presidential race after vote recount](#), AP News 2 December 2024; [Romania's vote recount confirms pro-Russian presidential bid](#), Financial Times, 2 December 2024

<sup>148</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [A shift further to the right. Radical parties are gaining popularity in Romania](#), 29 April 2024

<sup>149</sup> [Who is Romanian far-right presidential candidate Călin Georgescu?](#), Euronews, 25 November 2024

<sup>150</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Romania: the radical right's unexpected success in the first round of the presidential election](#), 25 November 2024

<sup>151</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Romania: the radical right's unexpected success in the first round of the presidential election](#), 25 November 2024

<sup>152</sup> [Who is Călin Georgescu, the far-right TikTok star leading the Romanian election race?](#), Politico, 25 November 2024

<sup>153</sup> [Romania election: Frontrunner Calin Georgescu vows to end Ukraine aid](#), BBC News, 5 December 2024; [How meddling blamed on Russia exploited real grievances in Romania](#), BBC News, 10 December 2024

Ukraine and NATO membership and the development of NATO's ballistic missile defence shield in Romania, describing the latter as confrontational.<sup>154</sup> Following the first-round Georgescu said that if elected president, he would stop all political and military aid for Ukraine.<sup>155</sup>

## Claims of Russian interference in election

Georgescu's surprise victory led to claims of Russian interference in the election. On 4 December, outgoing President Iohannis published declassified documents detailed what was described as a massive and "highly organised" campaign for Georgescu on TikTok.<sup>156</sup> The documents indicated that Georgescu's sudden rise had not been "a natural outcome" and was the result of artificially coordinated action to manipulate and exploit TikTok's algorithm.<sup>157</sup> The documents also indicated that Georgescu's social media campaign was managed by companies registered in various countries, operated numerous fake accounts and bots.<sup>158</sup> They said that the campaign was likely orchestrated by a "state actor". Russia was not directly blamed for this campaign but the assessment referred to Russia's hybrid attacks on Romania and a similar campaign in Ukraine.<sup>159</sup>

Romanian prosecutors announced they were opening a criminal investigation following the release of the documents. Georgescu said that claims of Russian involvement in his campaign were "lies" and said he was "not a fan" of President Putin.<sup>160</sup>

## Constitutional court annuls election

Following the disclosure of the intelligence documents, Romania's constitutional court on 6 December annulled the result of the first round of the election. The court said that Georgescu had engaged in manipulation by employing "non-transparent and election code-violating digital technologies, as well as artificial intelligence, during his campaign activities". It said this had resulted in the violation of the principle of equal opportunities for all presidential candidates and interfered in the principle of free and fair

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<sup>154</sup> [Who is Romanian far-right presidential candidate Călin Georgescu?](#), Euronews, 25 November 2024

<sup>155</sup> [Romania election: Frontrunner Călin Georgescu vows to end Ukraine aid](#), BBC News, 5 December 2024

<sup>156</sup> [Romania election: Frontrunner Călin Georgescu vows to end Ukraine aid](#), BBC News, 5 December 2024

<sup>157</sup> [EU demands 'urgent' answers from TikTok about possible foreign interference in Romanian election](#), Euronews, 6 December 2024

<sup>158</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Romania: Constitutional Court annuls the presidential election](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>159</sup> [EU demands 'urgent' answers from TikTok about possible foreign interference in Romanian election](#), Euronews, 6 December 2024

<sup>160</sup> [Romania election: Frontrunner Călin Georgescu vows to end Ukraine aid](#), BBC News, 5 December 2024

elections. The ruling also referred to the lack of transparency in the funding of Georgescu's campaign.<sup>161</sup>

The decision was welcomed by Prime Minister (and third place candidate in the annulled election) Marcel Ciolacu, who said that the election had been “flagrantly distorted following Russian intervention”. He said that Romanians needed “clear answers from the authorities based on solid evidence” and that “public trust in state institutions and in the democratic processes” depended on the investigation.<sup>162</sup>

However, other political leaders criticised the decision. This included Elena Lasconi, the USR leader who would have faced Georgescu in the run-off on 8 December. Lasconi said that the decision was “illegal, immoral and crushes the very essence of democracy”, while AUR leader George Simion labelled the decision a “coup d'état in full swing”. Georgescu himself said the decision was “a barbaric act done by the oligarch state against democracy” and that the “corrupt system in Romania made a pact with the devil”.<sup>163</sup> Legal commentators also criticised the legality and timing of the court's decision and the way it was reached.<sup>164</sup>

Earlier on 6 December, the European Commission had sent TikTok an urgent request for information on its role in the first round of the election, with a deadline of 24 hours. Henna Virkkunen, European Commission executive vice-president for tech sovereignty, security and democracy said the Commission was “concerned about mounting indications of coordinated foreign online influence operation targeting ongoing Romanian elections, especially on TikTok”.<sup>165</sup> The Commission launched formal proceedings against TikTok on 17 December for a suspected breach of the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) in relation its obligation to assess and mitigate risks linked to election integrity, and in the context of the Romanian presidential election.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Romania: Constitutional Court annuls the presidential election](#), 9 December 2024. For further analysis of the ruling see Alina Carrozzini, [Shooting Democracy in the Foot?](#), *Verfassungsblog*, 13 December 2024; Csongor Kuti, [On Means and Ends – The Annulment of the Romanian Presidential Elections](#), *Verfassungsblog*, 10 December 2024; and Richard Nash, [The Romanian 2024 Election Annulment: Addressing Emerging Threats to Electoral Integrity](#), The International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 20 December 2024

<sup>162</sup> [Romanian court cancels presidential election in unprecedented political earthquake](#), Euronews, 6 December 2024

<sup>163</sup> [Romanian court cancels presidential election in unprecedented political earthquake](#), Euronews, 6 December 2024

<sup>164</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Romania: Constitutional Court annuls the presidential election](#), 9 December 2024; See also Alina Carrozzini, [Shooting Democracy in the Foot? - The Romanian Constitutional Court's Annulment of Presidential Elections](#), *Verfassungsblog*, 13 December 2024; and Csongor Kuti, [On Means and Ends – The Annulment of the Romanian Presidential Elections](#), *Verfassungsblog*, 10 December 2024

<sup>165</sup> [EU demands 'urgent' answers from TikTok about possible foreign interference in Romanian election](#), Euronews, 6 December 2024

<sup>166</sup> European Commission, [Commission opens formal proceedings against TikTok on election risks under the Digital Services Act](#), 17 December 2024; [European Commission opens probe against TikTok over Romanian election](#), Euronews, 17 December 2024

The election re-run is expected to take place in the spring of 2025. Georgescu indicated that he would fight on, but there were also indications that he would be banned from standing. The mandate of President Iohannis, whose term of office was set to expire on 21 December 2024, will be extended in the meantime.<sup>167</sup>

## 2.3

## Parliamentary Election

The Parliamentary election was held on 1 December 2024, the week after the first round of the presidential election, and a week before scheduled second-round.

### Results

In the election, the PSD once again emerged as the leading party with 22% of the vote for the Chamber of Deputies. This was a further decline from the 28.9% it received in 2020. The AUR came second with 18% of the vote, nearly doubling from the 9.1% won in 2020. PNL came third with 13.2%, losing almost half its vote share of 25.2% in 2020. USR came fourth with 12.4% of the vote, and SOS Romania fifth with 7.4% of the vote. The newly formed Party of Young People (POT), which had supported Georgescu in the presidential election, came sixth with 6.5% of the vote. UDMR followed with 6.3% of the vote (see Table 2 below).<sup>168</sup>

Commentaries on the election highlighted the success of parties labelled as “far right” and opposed to Romania’s support for Ukraine, with AUR, SOS Romania and POT combined polling close to a third of the total vote share.<sup>169</sup> This success was attributed to a number of factors, including mistrust and disillusionment in the ruling parties, anger at corruption, and a search for alternatives since the PSD and PNL had established their grand coalition.<sup>170</sup> There was also discontent among some voters with EU membership.<sup>171</sup> AUR leader George Simion said it was “the beginning of a new era in which Romanians are reclaiming the right to decide their own destiny”.<sup>172</sup>

Following the annulling of the presidential election, there were also calls for the constitutional court to do likewise with the parliamentary election. Commentary on the court ruling noted that there was an inconsistency in the

<sup>167</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Romania: Constitutional Court annuls the presidential election](#), 9 December 2024

<sup>168</sup> Permanent Electoral Authority, Romania, [Prezenta la vot. Parlamentare Decembrie 2024](#) [accessed 19 December 2024]

<sup>169</sup> [Romania’s vote recount confirms pro-Russian presidential bid](#), Financial Times, 2 December 2024;

<sup>170</sup> Corinne Deloy, [The Social Democratic Party comes out ahead in Romania’s parliamentary elections, but far-right forces make inroads](#), Fondation Robert Schuman, 3 December 2024;

<sup>171</sup> OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, [Romania after the parliamentary election: a shift to the right](#), 2 December 2024

<sup>172</sup> Corinne Deloy, [The Social Democratic Party comes out ahead in Romania’s parliamentary elections, but far-right forces make inroads](#), Fondation Robert Schuman, 3 December 2024



annulling of one election and not the other given that the intelligence reports revealed similar irregularities in the parliamentary election, with the aggressive TikTok campaign in the weeks preceding the election also favouring the new POT party that supported Georgescu.<sup>173</sup>

**Table 2 Romania Parliamentary election, 1 December 2024**

Party	Chamber of Deputies		Senate	
	Vote Share	Seats	Vote Share	Seats
Social Democratic Party (PSD)	21.96%	86	22.3%	36
Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR)	18.01%	64	18.3%	28
National Liberal Party (PNL)	13.2%	49	14.28%	22
Save Romania Union (USR)	12.4%	40	12.26%	19
SOS Romania	7.36%	27	7.76%	12
Party of Young People (POT)	6.46%	24	6.39%	7
Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR)	6.33%	22	6.38%	10
Others (minority parties)	14.28%	18*	12.33%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>330</b>		<b>134</b>

Source: Permanent Electoral Authority, Romania, [Prezenta la vot, Parlamentare Decembrie 2024](#) [accessed 19 December 2024]; Europa World, [Romania: Chamber of Deputies \(Camera Deputaţilor\)](#) [accessed 23 December 2024]; Senate, Romania, [Grupuri parlamentare](#) [accessed 23 December 2024]

\*The other seats in the Chamber of Deputies went to parties representing national and linguistic minorities in Romania

## Government formation

Although during the PNL repeated during the election campaign that it would not take part in another coalition government with the PSD, coalition talks commenced following the election involving the PNL, PSD, USR and UDMR.<sup>174</sup> The willingness of USR to join such a coalition had also previously been in doubt given its fierce criticisms of both the PSD and PNL, particularly over perceived inaction on corruption.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Alina Carrozzini, [Shooting Democracy in the Foot? - The Romanian Constitutional Court's Annulment of Presidential Elections](#), Verfassungsblog, 13 December 2024; Alexandru Damian, [The annulment of Romania's presidential election reflects both foreign meddling and domestic failures](#), LSE Europ blog, 13 December 2024

<sup>174</sup> Corinne Deloy, [The ruling Social Democrats are favourites in Romania's parliamentary and presidential elections](#), Fondation Robert Schuman, 12 November 2024

<sup>175</sup> [Five Takeaways From Romania's Parliamentary Elections](#), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 20 December 2024

On 11 December 2024, the four parties announced they had agreed a pro-EU governing coalition, which they said was aimed at building “trust in institutions and the political class through good governance, transparency in public spending and respect for citizens”.<sup>176</sup>

Following further talks the PSD withdrew from the proposed coalition on 19 December.<sup>177</sup> This followed reported tensions between PSD and USR with the latter insisting on greater clarity over tax and spending plans before the government could be confirmed.<sup>178</sup> PSD leader Ciolacu referred to “egos and ideological clichés” among the other parties which had made it impossible to reach a governing agreement, but said the PSD was willing to vote for a minority government so that Romania has political stability.<sup>179</sup>

However, PSD then rejoined the talks with reports indicating that USR was no longer involved.<sup>180</sup> On 23 December, agreement on a coalition government involving PSD, PNL and UDMR and some small ethnic minority parties was announced, with Ciolacu as Prime Minister again. The parties would also be seeking to agree on a single presidential candidate for the election re-run in 2025.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> [Romania's pro-EU parties clinch deal to form coalition government](#), Euronews, 11 December 2024

<sup>177</sup> [Romanian ruling Social Democrats withdraw from government coalition talks](#), Reuters, 19 December 2024

<sup>178</sup> [Romanian government talks hampered by demand for fiscal clarity](#), Reuters, 16 December 2024

<sup>179</sup> [Romanian ruling Social Democrats withdraw from government coalition talks](#), Reuters, 19 December 2024; [Romania's victorious PSD withdraws from government formation talks](#), Euractiv, 20 December 2024

<sup>180</sup> [Romanian president 'optimistic' about prospects for pro-European majority government](#), Euractiv, 23 December 2024

<sup>181</sup> [Romanian president nominates incumbent PM to lead new pro-European government](#), Euronews, 23 December 2024; [Romanian president tasks Social Democrat with forming new government](#), Reuters, 23 December 2024

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