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MAGA casts a shadow on US-Romanian relations

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In recent weeks, Bucharest has faced a wave of criticism from representatives of the US administration and the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement, purportedly led by Elon Musk. This backlash follows a ruling by Romania's Constitutional Court on 6 December 2024, which annulled the presidential election just two days before the second round (see '*Romania: Constitutional Court annuls the presidential election*'). The decision has put the government coalition in a difficult position. As with all Romanian cabinets since the late 1990s, it regards close cooperation and alliance with the United States as a fundamental value and a pillar of national security. The government is keen to avoid open conflict with Donald Trump's administration, particularly in light of growing concerns over US unpredictability and the future of American military presence in Europe, including in Romania.

At the same time, Bucharest is actively seeking to block Călin Georgescu – the anti-establishment candidate known for his pro-Russian statements who won the annulled first round – from participating in the re-run of the presidential race. On 26 February, Romanian prosecutors brought a series of criminal charges against him, including an alleged attempt to organise a constitutional coup, and placed him under judicial supervision. However, the final decision on his candidacy appears to depend on Washington's position. Bucharest has likewise refrained from adopting a clear position in the escalating dispute between Washington and the EU, as it has consistently done, maintaining its support for transatlantic unity.

Criticism and pressure from the US

During his speech at the Munich Security Conference, US Vice President J.D. Vance openly criticised Romania for cancelling the presidential election at the end of 2024. He argued that the decision was 'based on the flimsy suspicions of an intelligence agency' and was made under 'immense pressure from its continental neighbours'. Notably, a report issued by the Venice Commission on 27 January was critical of the Romanian Constitutional Court's justification for its ruling. It stated that 'such decisions must not be based solely on classified intelligence (…), as this would not guarantee the necessary transparency' (see '*Urgent report on the cancellation of election results by constitutional courts*'). Vance also questioned Romania's democratic resilience, suggesting that it 'wasn't very strong' if Russia could 'destroy it with a few hundred thousand dollars of digital advertising' on social media. His remarks referred to statements from Bucharest officials, who argued that Georgescu had been backed by the Kremlin. According to Romanian authorities, Moscow not only co-financed but also coordinated his campaign on TikTok, facilitating his electoral success.

Vance also stated that 'there is nothing America can do' for those who 'are running in fear their own voters.' In Romania, this was widely interpreted as a warning that attempts to sideline Georgescu or other radical right-wing politicians opposed to the mainstream could negatively impact bilateral relations. On 20 February, during the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), the US Vice President elaborated on this point. He argued that friendship with European allies is based on shared values, which cannot exist 'when you cancel elections because you don't like the result – and that happened in Romania'.

Bucharest has also faced continued criticism from Musk. In recent weeks, he has repeatedly posted on X in support of Georgescu or in opposition to Romanian state officials for actions taken against the politician. In one post, he called the head of Romania's Constitutional Court a 'tyrant.' In another, he responded to Georgescu's announcement of plans to 'ban the entire Soros network' with a statement that the country 'deserves its own sovereignty.' Musk also promoted an interview Georgescu gave in January to Alex Jones, a prominent American influencer and commentator associated with the MAGA movement.

Recent media reports suggest that US authorities have been pressuring Bucharest on two fronts: the case of Călin Georgescu and that of the Tate brothers, controversial but highly popular American-British influencers associated with the MAGA movement. The Tate brothers were arrested in Romania in 2022 on multiple charges which included human trafficking and setting up an organised criminal group. Over time, their detention was downgraded to house arrest, and since January 2025, they have been under judicial supervision. On 17 February, the *Financial Times*, citing its own sources, reported that US diplomats had been exerting pressure on Romania to allow the brothers to leave the country. Two days later, *Bloomberg* published a report stating that, according to its information, US officials had repeatedly warned Romanian authorities during recent meetings against obstructing Georgescu's candidacy in the presidential election re-run. Romania's foreign minister has denied both reports.

The Romanian government's response

Following the Munich conference, Bucharest initially avoided direct confrontation with Vice President Vance and his allegations. Instead, senior government officials issued numerous statements reaffirming Romania's credibility as a partner, its commitment to the US alliance, and its adherence to democratic values, including free and fair elections. Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu declared that 'Romania remains a defender of the democratic values' that Europe shares with the USA and that its authorities are committed to holding 'free and fair elections.' Acting President Ilie Bolojan affirmed that Romania remains a reliable ally. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Emil Hurezeanu acknowledged the 'sensitivity of the new US administration,' which is particularly vigilant regarding 'possible election manipulations' due to lingering concerns over the conduct of the 2020 US presidential elections. He also emphasised the need to clarify any misunderstandings with American partners.

Bucharest's stance on US criticism has shifted over time. On 22 February, Hurezeanu stated that Musk's public endorsements of Georgescu could be seen as a form of interference in Romanian politics. However, he implied that this did not constitute official US meddling in Romania's internal affairs, as Musk – despite his influence – is not a member of the US administration. That same day, Siegfried Mureșean, a prominent MEP from the ruling National Liberal Party (PNL) and Vice-President of the European People's Party (EPP), also

criticised Musk's remarks. Additionally, the foreign minister responded to Vance's accusations, asserting that the sums Russia invested in Georgescu's campaign were far greater than the 'few hundred thousand dollars' mentioned by the US Vice President. He also insisted that the decision to annul the elections was justified.

Bucharest is testing Washington

Although the Romanian government is clearly intent on preventing Georgescu from participating in the re-run of the presidential election, it does not appear willing to do so in the face of open opposition from Washington. Maintaining strong relations with the US remains a priority. For this reason, it is currently assessing the extent of the US administration's commitment to supporting Georgescu. Romanian officials hope that Vance's rhetoric was less a defence of Georgescu himself and more an attempt to use his case – and, more broadly, the cancelled elections in Romania – as a tool against the political establishment in Western Europe, particularly in Germany, France, and the UK. These countries were his primary targets of his criticism. Before his first-round success, Georgescu had no known links to MAGA, nor was he widely recognised in these circles. He aligned himself with that movement – securing the backing of the far-right AUR party, Romania's second-largest parliamentary force – only shortly before the annulled second round.

This approach likely influenced the decision to detain Georgescu on 26 February, a move that is expected to provide grounds for the Constitutional Court to bar him from running. The National Prosecutor's Office has brought multiple charges against him, placed him under judicial supervision, and prohibited him from using social media, effectively hampering his ongoing campaign. The allegations include attempts to undermine the constitutional order, opaque campaign financing, and collaboration with fascist movements.

Georgescu's uncertain future

The Romanian government is pushing for swift progress in the ongoing investigation into Georgescu and is leveraging it as a tool to undermine him politically. The charges brought by the prosecution, combined with his numerous controversial statements – such as his praise for Romanian fascists from the World War II era – could also serve as grounds for the Constitutional Court to reject his candidacy, aligning with the government's objectives.

At the same time, the authorities will seek to obtain Washington's approval or at least its neutrality on the matter. This is likely why the Tate brothers were recently permitted to leave Romania. However, if the US expresses clear opposition to blocking Georgescu, the judges handling his case will face intense pressure to allow him to run in the presidential race.