

Romania: new presidential election without Georgescu

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On 15 March, the registration of candidates for the re-run presidential election in Romania, scheduled for 4 May, was concluded. Among the candidates approved by the Central Election Bureau (CEB) are Crin Antonescu (representing the ruling coalition of the centre-left Social Democratic Party – PSD – and the centre-right National Liberal Party – PNL), George Simion (leader of the national-conservative Alliance for the Union of Romanians – AUR), Anamaria Gavrilă (leader of the radical right-affiliated Party of Young People – POT), Nicușor Dan (mayor of Bucharest and an independent centre-right candidate); and Victor Ponta (former Prime Minister and PSD leader, now standing as an independent candidate with ties to Trump's supporters).

Earlier, on 9 March, the Central Election Bureau (CEB) rejected the candidacy of Călin Georgescu, a far-right nationalist known for his pro-Russian statements, territorial claims against Ukraine, and his opposition to European integration. In the first round of the presidential election, which took place on 24 November 2024 (with the runoff scheduled for 8 December) and was subsequently annulled by the Constitutional Court (CC), he had secured the best result, obtaining 23% of the vote (see '[Romania: Constitutional Court annuls the presidential election](#)'). According to polls, the politician currently enjoys approximately 40% support. Pro-Russian MEP Diana Șoșoacă, leader of the SOS Romania party, has also been barred from the electoral race, as she was prior to the annulled 2024 election.

Despite his high level of support in the polls, the exclusion of Georgescu from the electoral race did not provoke a significant reaction from the public. The United States has also not commented on the CEB's decision, even though it had previously criticised Bucharest for annulling the first round of the 2024 election, in which Georgescu had emerged victorious.

Commentary

- **The rejection of Georgescu's candidacy provisionally brings an end to the political crisis that has been ongoing since December 2024.** Despite his high level of public support, neither the decision of the Central Election Bureau (CEB) nor the subsequent ruling by the Constitutional Court on 11 March, confirming the decision, led to large-scale public protests. Although Simion and Gavrilă, along with a portion of the political class, have condemned Georgescu's exclusion as an effective coup d'état and claim to be standing for president in order to 'restore' the annulled runoff, they have neither challenged the ongoing electoral process nor declared it illegitimate. The basis for the CEB's decision to bar Georgescu from the race was a prior ruling by the Constitutional Court passed on 6 December 2024, which annulled the entire electoral process and mandated a new

election. According to the justices, Georgescu had violated the principle of equal opportunity among candidates by manipulating social media algorithms, thereby gaining an unfair advantage over his competitors. He also failed to disclose the sources of his campaign financing. Furthermore, the Constitutional Court determined that his online campaign had been supported by an external 'state actor' (implicitly, Russia). Based on this ruling, the CEB concluded that a candidate who does not uphold the principle of equal opportunity in a presidential election also fails to respect democratic norms and the constitution – standards that the head of state (and, by extension, any contender for the office) is required to uphold.

- **It remains unclear who will inherit Georgescu's electorate.** Following the announcement of his exclusion from the race, he endorsed both Simion and Gavrilă. However, the two politicians have stated that they will not compete against each other and that, following internal polling, one of them will withdraw from the election. At present, it seems most likely that Simion will be the radical right's representative. Some Romanian media outlets and politicians have accused him of maintaining ties to Russia. Polls suggest he could secure approximately 30% of the vote and is likely to face either Bucharest mayor Dan (approximately 25%) or the ruling coalition's candidate, Antonescu (around 18%), in the runoff. However, it cannot be ruled out that Gavrilă may refuse to withdraw from the race, thereby attracting some of Simion's support. Additionally, a portion of Georgescu's mobilised electorate may choose to abstain from voting altogether.
- **The decision to exclude Georgescu from the presidential election has, thus far, not prompted a response from the United States.** However, the authorities in Bucharest fear potential criticism from the Donald Trump administration and a deterioration in relations with Washington. Previously, during the Munich Security Conference, US Vice President J.D. Vance condemned Romania, stating that the 2024 election had been annulled simply because the country's establishment disapproved of the outcome. Additionally, Georgescu has received open support on the X social media platform from Elon Musk, a key adviser to Trump (see '[MAGA casts a shadow on US-Romanian relations](#)'). In light of these concerns, Bucharest has recently made several symbolic gestures towards Trump. The state-run National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) has nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize, while the Romanian prosecution authorities have permitted the Tate brothers – controversial American influencers popular within the MAGA movement – to leave the country for the US despite ongoing legal proceedings against them in Romania on charges of human trafficking and running an organised criminal group.