

**Réunion du Groupe de Travail "Voisinages", 3 JUIN 2025, 10h30 - 12h30**

**12.00-12.15. Élections en Roumanie. Quelles significations ?**

**ALORS QU'UNE ÉPREUVE DIFFICILE DE LA DÉMOCRATIE A ÉTÉ  
SURMONTÉE, LES PLUS GRANDS DÉFIS SONT À VENIR**

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## **Background**

On May 18, 2025, Nicusor Dan a mayor of Bucharest, who ran as an independent, has won the longest, and probably the most divisive Romanian post-communist presidential election. In the run-off, he prevailed with 53.8% of the vote over the far-right, lately turned pro-Trump, Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) leader George Simion, who secured only 46.2%. In the first round, on May 4, Simion had been in the lead with 41%, while Dan finished second with 21%. On May 26, Dan has been officially sworn in as new president, apparently ending the worst political crisis to grip the country in decades after the annulment of the previous election on December 6, 2024. In the presidential election rerun, Dan ran on an “Honest Romania” ticket, reaffirming Western ties, continued support for Ukraine, and fiscal reforms.

Dan did not participate in the initial presidential election held on November 24, 2024. At that time, Călin Georgescu, a previously obscure ultranationalist candidate who espoused pro-Russian views banking on voters' fears that the war in Ukraine might expand to Romania, had won 22% of the vote in his first-round victory. Georgescu's campaign falsely declared zero expenditures to the Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP), despite the proliferation of pro-Georgescu content on social media platforms, including Facebook, Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube. In December, Romanian intelligence declassified reports that revealed coordination among Russian-operated bots and paid users on social media platforms, backed by over a million dollars of funding from undisclosed sources, to boost Georgescu. Western governments, including president Macron and the Biden administration, amplified claims of Russian interference. Consequently, the Constitutional Court stepped in on December 6, 2024, voiding the election results and scheduling a re-run for May 2025. Citing violations of democratic norms and national security threats, the court asserted that it was stepping in to protect the constitutional order. But the annulment of the elections ignited a firestorm, as did his subsequent indictment by Romanian prosecutors on charges of

incitement to actions against the constitutional order and of the establishment of a fascist organization. In March, the same Court disqualified Georgescu from running in the do-over election. For millions of ordinary voters, those moves confirmed long-standing suspicions that their country's democracy had become a sham, rigged from above. At the Munich Security Conference in February, U.S. Vice President JD Vance sharply criticized the Constitutional Court's decision based, as he put it, on the "*flimsy suspicions of an intelligence agency and on pressure from European neighbours*".

In the May 2024 re-run, Georgescu's voters were mostly taken over by Simion who strived, and largely succeeded, to parrot Georgescu's electoral messages and methods to win the annulled first round of the elections of November 2024. In the run up to the second round this year, he insisted he would be a pro-EU and pro-NATO leader, claiming he was aligned with Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, and boasting his alliance with Donald Trump's MAGA movement as a way to keep U.S. troops committed to Romania. "*We are a Euro-realist group, not Eurosceptic*," Simion told "Politico" in an interview. Notably, his party AUR is belonging to the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament. (<https://politico.eu>)

## Analysis

- 1) President Dan's tenure has started with a tough political challenge: he must build-up a new ruling coalition which should look credible to a public widely disappointed with the recent performance of mainstream political parties. Romanian analysts argued that the outcomes of the presidential elections both in November 2024 and in May 2025 had been driven by a **protest vote against a political class** that, "*over decades, has hollowed out its own credibility. Party leaders prioritized loyalty and corruption over competence, opportunism over policy and values, sidelined internal meritocracy, and turned representative democracy into a performance without substance.*" ("When Disillusion Meets Interference in Romania", <https://carnegieendowment.org>). However, the new Parliament resulting from the November 2024 legislative elections, who shall vote on the new prime-minister and government, consists of mainstream pro-European political parties (about 2/3) and far-right populist/ sovereigntist parties (about 1/3). Furthermore, the pro-European political parties are split over creating a new government coalition: after four years of government with the Liberals, the Social-

Democrats might prefer to remain in opposition and support a Liberal coalition minority government, while president Dan and the other pro-European parties would rather have a stable pro-European coalition (including the Social-Democrats) supporting a majority government led by the Liberal Ilie Bolojan. Within this highly divisive political context, setting up a “credible” government able to fulfil his electoral commitments for deeper institutional, socio-economic and fiscal reforms will be the first major challenge for the new president.

- 2) The Romanian electorate’s shift toward far-right populist candidates has not been aligned with anti-Western attitudes. Recent polling data indicated that almost 90% of Romanians believed closer relations with the EU, US, and NATO were in the national interest. Such a dichotomy could be explained by the voters’ wish to punish the ruling class for their corruption and perceived inability to effectively negotiate on behalf of Romanian interests with the EU institutions. The result was many of the disappointed voters drifting toward politicians with ambivalent or hostile views toward the West, leading to Romania entering a period of domestic tensions with broader geopolitical implications.
- 3) On the foreign and security policy front, president Dan’s challenges wouldn’t be any easier to tackle. Over the shorter term, his victory will calm fears that Romania might join Hungary and Slovakia in opposing assistance for Ukraine and moving closer to Moscow. Situated next to the EU’s vulnerable Eastern neighbourhood, Romania is part of a strategic frontline. Aside from its long borders with Ukraine and Moldova, it hosts key NATO military infrastructure and plays a vital role in Western efforts to contain Russian influence in the Black Sea region. However, as the latest electoral campaigns have clearly showed, Romania has become a choice target of Russian efforts to sow division among EU and NATO members. This major external challenge will not simply go away as the new government will have to make largely unpopular decisions for reducing the country’s over-sized fiscal deficit while having to massively spend for aligning itself to increased European strategic autonomy on security and defence.
- 4) Balancing relations with the EU institutions and with president Trump’s Euro-sceptic administration will be another challenge for the new Romanian president, in particular in terms of calibrating regional geopolitical imperatives in the Black Sea with realities on the ground. Some analysts fear that this presidential election may have created an opportunity for hostile actors to undermine Romanians' faith

in democracy by exposing a divide between the Western-aligned establishment and the far-right, anti-globalist outliers of the society. (“Romania’s Postponed Reckoning”- <https://foreignaffairs.com>). How to maintain the pro-Western geopolitical orientation of the country and re-build Romanians’ trust in public institutions would be key to president Dan’s success in office.