



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# A turning point in the principal link of NATO's border to the east



The Romanian Constitutional Court has put an end to a brief period of uncertainty in the election game full of shifts, **allowing** Romanians to go into the second round of the uncertain presidential election on Sunday.

The court rejected the appeal of an unsuccessful presidential candidate last Monday and declared the first round of the 24 November elections regular. This paved the way for a duel between the two most successful candidates, anti-NATO populist, Călin Georgescu and Elena Lasconi from the centrist Union Save Romania.

While this judicial clarification will only clear up procedural doubts, it will not do much to untangle relations on the political stage, where the presidential and parliamentary elections have triggered a completely new and unexpected dynamic.

Most of the pre-election **polls** in Romania were completely wrong. From the side-lines and without much chance in the polls, the controversial Călin Georgescu, an independent candidate with a pronounced pro-Russian and anti-NATO orientation, rose to the top.

With 23% of the vote and in first place, he goes into the second round of the election on Sunday with great enthusiasm to win the highly influential post of president. He will face opposition from Ms Lasconi, a pro-NATO politician who did not perform well in the pre-election polls.

## Protest vote

Both expect to attract the votes of candidates with similar views who failed in the first round and to win over a larger group of populist and nationalist Eurosceptics (Georgescu) on the one hand and pro-EU and pro-NATO voters (Lasconi) on the other.

Mr Georgescu's unexpected success is due to the apparently large number of Romanians who voted in protest, i.e., against the establishment of the mainstream parties.

However, this group will have a candidate who is considered a slight favourite in the second round, which means that voters with a similar nationalist orientation will be much more enthusiastic.

On the other hand, the entire complex of pro-European and pro-NATO voters will be forced to cast a protest vote for Ms Lasconi in order to prevent an unpredictable populist from coming to power.

## Romania is entering the second round of presidential elections with a rather confusing political picture

Romania is thus entering the second round of presidential elections with a rather confusing political picture. The results of the parliamentary elections, which took place last Sunday right in the middle between the two rounds, have added to this confusion.

Under the leadership of current Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu, the Social Democratic Party has maintained its **dominance** and offers significant potential for forming a government in cooperation with related parties of the moderate right and the Liberals.

## New cohabitation

If the nationalist Georgescu wins the presidency on Sunday, different political options will occupy the presidential cabinet and the government, reflecting a fairly truthful distribution of political moods in Romania.

But what does this possible cohabitation mean for the Romanian state? Romania is no stranger to the diversity of political options for the two leading positions. Even the current president, Klaus Iohannis, who leads the Liberals, shares power with the Social Democratic government.

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If Mr Georgescu were to win, however, Romania would be entering uncharted territory, as this would mean a disagreement between the president and the government on fundamental state policy.

For Mr Georgescu, Vladimir Putin is, for example, one of the "true leaders of the world," and Romania should abide by "Russian wisdom." In 2022, when Russia had already invaded Ukraine, Mr Georgescu expressed these views, leading to a significant dissonance between his country's and government's prevailing position of full support for Ukraine and the condemnation of Moscow's aggression.

Although people often do not take Georgescu's **ties** with Russia seriously due to his unconventional political style, the country faces the possibility of a politician emerging who will shatter the previous image of unwavering support for Ukraine.

## Is the NATO border on the Black Sea in crisis?

The rise of Georgescu and even more so of all other populist, right-wing, and NATO-sceptic forces calls into question the true commitment of Romanians to NATO, which stands at 80%.

Regardless of the outcome of next Sunday's elections, Romania, as one of the most important members of the EU and NATO, has seen a weakening of political support for the two alliances on its eastern borders.



*Romania, as one of the most important members of the EU and NATO, has seen a weakening of political support for the two alliances on its eastern borders - Elena Lasconi*

Romania has already joined the list of states in the Black Sea region where the presence of pro-Russian options is evident, often to the point of disrupting state policies that are in line with the European and transatlantic alliances.

In Georgia, the pro-Russian ruling party, Georgian Dream, is **striving** to hold onto power despite widespread protests by pro-EU citizens due to election rigging.

In the Republic of Moldova, the pro-European forces have narrowly **defeated** their pro-Russian rivals, but they face a crucial test in the uncertain parliamentary elections in the spring.

There has not been a functioning government in Bulgaria for several years, and the parliamentary elections failed to elevate the pro-European forces, who are now facing opposition from Eurosceptics and pro-Russian options.

Romania is the largest country in this region and, at the same time, the most stable NATO ally in its strategically important area. It faces the same political challenges as other Black Sea democracies.

Next Sunday's elections will therefore be an important turning point for the stability of one of the most important links at the European and NATO borders against aggressive Russian influence.