



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# The Romanian presidential elections in the vortex of changed relations in the West



The presidential elections in Romania have become one of the most important battlefields between the West and Russia for influence in Eastern Europe and, at the same time, NATO's strategically important eastern flank.

But at the same time, Romania is also at the centre of disputes between the USA and Europe that have escalated since Donald Trump took office, so the centuries-old alliance is being called into question.

The outcome of the Romanian presidential elections, the first round of which is scheduled for 4 May, will of course not resolve all the lines of conflict under which they are being held. But it will paint a somewhat clearer picture of the relationship between the forces confronting each other on European soil.

The controversial Călin Georgescu, a previously invisible politician with a strong pro-Russian orientation, will not be on the ballot in the 4 May election, despite having received the most votes in the previous, later annulled, round of voting.

His **disqualification** by the state electoral commission sparked violent protests by thousands of Georgescu's supporters and clashes with police. His case is at the centre of a political crisis in Romania, and the controversy over the legitimacy of his candidacy will not subside until the day of the election.

## Shaken credibility of elections

The far-right Georgescu has the chance to re-enter the race if the Romanian Constitutional Court cancels the disqualification imposed on him by the electoral commission. But this is the same court that made a **decision** in December that shocked many—namely, to annul the first round of elections precisely because of the manipulations that helped Georgescu reach the leading position.

At the time, the court was guided by the findings of the Romanian intelligence services, according to which Georgescu achieved his

success thanks to a massive and "highly organised" cyber operation from abroad (Russia), which favoured him and was supported by illegal financing, also from abroad, via online applications.

**Georgescu did not "meet the conditions of legality" and he "violated the very obligation to defend democracy"**

The Romanian Electoral Commission (BEC) has now announced that Georgescu did not "meet the conditions of legality" and that he "violated the very obligation to defend democracy."

The credibility of the electoral process in Romania was already seriously shaken before 24 November, when the first round took place, which was later annulled. It was compromised by a massive disinformation campaign, fake news, and the promotion of Georgescu's narrative mainly through TikTok (almost half of the 20 million inhabitants use it), which, according to the Romanian intelligence service's findings, was managed by Russian cyber capacities under the Kremlin's control.

The Romanian institutions, including the recent decisions of the electoral commission and the expected confirmation by the Constitutional Court, have taken a decisive, albeit risky, step to annul practically the entire electoral process in order to decontaminate it from Russian influence.

## American doubts

While European capitals welcomed the fact that Georgescu was prevented from winning the presidency with the help of Russian manipulation, the United States played the complete opposite.

Romania cancelled the election based on the "flimsy suspicions of an intelligence agency and enormous pressure from its continental neighbours," **said** US Vice President JD Vance at the February security conference in Munich.

## For the new American administration, the Romanian case is one of the most important points of reference for confronting Europe over the Ukraine war

"If your democracy can be destroyed with a few hundred thousand dollars of digital advertising from a foreign country, then it wasn't very strong to begin with," JD Vance said then, in one of the many shocking messages for Europeans he brought to Munich.

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## In the shadow of the conflict within the West

Washington trivialising Russian interference in the Romanian elections was undoubtedly one of the concessions made to Moscow prior to the peace talks on Ukraine.

For the Trump administration, which sees a rival in the common European commitment to the defence of Ukraine, the Romanian elections are a trump card for the promotion of a populist, sovereigntist policy in which there is no mercy for "alienated" or "unelected" institutions, including the courts.



*The US bases in Romania are maintained and will even increase their importance - Keith Kellogg*

The American interpretation of the Romanian election crisis, where they support the Russian attempt to compromise them, has raised the question of whether American troops should stay in one of NATO's most important member states on its eastern flank.

The head of Romanian diplomacy, Emil Hurezeanu, recently made an open request to the US and received a favourable response from the White House envoy to Ukraine, Gen. Keith Kellogg.

"They (US bases) are maintained and will even increase their importance," **said** Gen. Kellogg, according to the Romanian foreign minister.

However, the unabated intensification of relations between Europe and the European part of NATO on the one hand and Washington on the other in connection with Russia and Ukraine gives Romanians little reason to believe the words of the envoy Kellogg.

The period leading up to the May elections in Romania will therefore be strongly influenced by international circumstances, and perhaps even their outcome will be largely determined by the unfolding of several ongoing fronts.