

**INTERIM REPORT**  
**24 March – 15 April 2025**

**17 April 2025**

**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- The 4 May repeat presidential election follows the Constitutional Court’s annulment of the November 2024 vote based on findings of co-ordinated manipulation of social networks and undeclared funding in support of one candidate. Many ODIHR LEOM interlocutors noted limited publicly available information on the nature and impact of the detected irregularities as well as the legal grounds for the annulment, and opined that this has affected public trust in some state institutions.
- The electoral legal framework remains largely unchanged since the last presidential election, except for amendments introduced by a Government Emergency Ordinance less than four months before election day. This ordinance, adopted without public consultation, introduced changes on political advertising, the composition of election bodies, and polling hours abroad. Several ODIHR LEOM interlocutors considered the frequent use of ordinances to amend electoral law as undermining legal certainty. Most previous ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed, including those on consolidating the electoral legislation, ensuring transparency in election administration, establishing clear procedures for verifying support signatures, and providing access for observers to all stages of the electoral process.
- The election is administered by the Permanent Electoral Authority (PEA) and a three-tiered structure of electoral bureaus established for each election, led by the Central Electoral Bureau (CEB). The election administration has met legal deadlines to date. Sessions of election bureaus are not public, and the membership of election bureaus do not include representatives of independent candidates, while those nominated by a political party not represented in parliament have limited representation. Voter education efforts have thus far been conducted primarily online. The PEA has undertaken several measures to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities.
- Approximately 19 million citizens are eligible to vote, including one million residing abroad. All citizens aged 18 or older are eligible to vote, except those disenfranchised by a court decision due to criminal convictions or legal incapacity. The PEA maintains the voter register, which is based on the civil registry and other official data. Requests for corrections in voters’ data can be submitted until two weeks before election day. Voters abroad can cast their ballots either by mail or in person. An electronic system will be used at all polling stations to verify voter eligibility and prevent multiple voting.
- Citizens over 35 years of age with voting rights and permanent residence in Romania may stand for election. The CEB initially registered 12 candidates from 25 applications. Thirteen candidates did not meet registration requirements, including two who were rejected based on a 2024 Constitutional Court ruling requiring candidates to fulfil conditions reflected in the presidential oath. One registered candidate subsequently withdrew. The CEB has no competence to verify the authenticity of support signatures, and limits its review of signatures to assessing compliance with formal requirements.
- Following the 2024 parliamentary elections, women hold 22.4 per cent of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 20.3 per cent in the Senate; only 11 per cent of ministers are women. Two of the 11 registered presidential candidates are women. Despite constitutional guarantees of gender

equality, entrenched stereotypes and the limited scope and implementation of relevant legal provisions continue to hinder women's political participation, with many ODIHR LEOM interlocutors noting a need to improve women representation in decision-making positions.

- The law guarantees equal access of contestants to media, campaign venues and poster spaces. The campaign has been low-key to date, with most candidates engaging with the electorate online, and, to a much lesser extent, using posters, leaflets, and larger rallies. Newly adopted regulations broadened the definition of political advertising to include various forms of online content and indirect promotion of contestants, and introduced additional labelling requirements, which some candidate representatives consider overly burdensome and ineffective in addressing certain online violations, including co-ordinated manipulation of social networks.
- The CEB established an inter-institutional Working Group to examine complaints related to online campaign violations and to co-ordinate responses, including instructing Very Large Online Platforms to remove unlawful content via the PEA. Complaints, which may be submitted online, including anonymously, are reviewed on a continuous basis, and case files are prepared; however, the Working Group does not proactively monitor online platforms. As of 14 April, the CEB had published details of 248 complaints, resulting in 178 removal orders concerning 629 posts, mostly for missing labelling. Sessions of the CEB are not public, but decisions are posted online. Some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors raised concerns about the CEB's limited capacity to detect foreign influence and noted a perceived lack of transparency and proportionality in content removals.
- Campaigns can be financed by political parties, including from public funds, as well as by candidates' own resources, loans, and individual donations. Campaign finance regulations, which also apply to online activities, are limited to the official 30-day campaign period. Nevertheless, several candidates incurred advertising expenses prior to this period, including on social networks. Contestants must report contributions and expenditures to the PEA and submit complete final reports within 30 days after election day. The PEA is not mandated to verify the veracity of reported figures beyond the supporting documentation provided, which, according to several ODIHR LEOM interlocutors, may allow for inaccurately disclosed financial activity.
- The media landscape is diverse; however, there is a lack of transparency concerning the financing of media by political entities and individuals, which some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors assessed as undermining editorial independence and facilitating clientelism and self-censorship. Broadcasters are required to ensure fair, balanced, and impartial campaign coverage, and provide equal and free access to airtime for all presidential candidates. The National Audiovisual Council, as the competent regulatory authority, is mandated to examine complaints and act *ex officio* in cases of violations of campaign coverage requirements. During the campaign period, it has not reported any complaints and issued one sanction related to a public opinion poll.
- The Constitution guarantees the rights of national minorities, including political representation and use of minority languages in education and in communication with local authorities. No candidates belonging to national minorities are standing in this election, and, according to the PEA, electoral materials will not be made available in minority languages. Roma continue to be underrepresented in public and political life and often face limited access to public services and identity documentation, which some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors think may hinder their ability to vote.
- Complaints and appeals are adjudicated by both electoral bureaus and judicial authorities, with distinct rules governing their submission depending on the nature of the issue. To date, the CEB has received 12 complaints concerning the composition of electoral bureaus, all of which were rejected, while lower-level bodies published decisions adjudicating complaints and appeals, mainly related to appointment of polling station staff. Most ODIHR LEOM interlocutors have expressed trust in the efficiency of the dispute resolution system and the impartiality of the

adjudicating bodies, with some exceptions related to the adjudication of alleged online violations.

- The legal framework permits observation of election day procedures by citizen and international observers, but does not regulate access to other stages of the electoral process. The citizen observer landscape is active, though affected by reported operational and financial constraints. Several civil society organizations are actively monitoring the electoral process and have published reports.

## II. INTRODUCTION

Following an invitation from the authorities of Romania to observe the presidential election, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed a Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM) on 23 March.<sup>1</sup> The LEOM, led by Eoghan Murphy, consists of a 13-member core team based in Bucharest and 22 long-term observers deployed throughout the country from 2 April. Mission members are drawn from 18 OSCE participating States, and 40 per cent of mission members are women.

## III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections in Romania, held at the conclusion of President Klaus Iohannis's mandate, unfolded against a backdrop of a growing disaffection with mainstream political parties. The first round of the presidential election took place on 24 November 2024. Following the vote, the Central Election Bureau (CEB) announced that independent candidate Călin Georgescu and Elena Lasconi of the Save Romania Union (USR) qualified for the second round, having received 23 and 19 per cent of the vote, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary elections were held one week later, on 1 December. A coalition government was subsequently formed by the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the National Liberal Party (PNL), and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians (RMDSZ/UDMR), with the support of national minority parties.

Both before and shortly after the first round of the presidential election, civil society actors, journalists, and political party representatives voiced concerns about the integrity of the campaign.<sup>3</sup> On 2 December, the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) validated the election results, citing no evidence of major irregularities affecting the overall outcome.<sup>4</sup> However, on 4 December, declassified intelligence reports were published outlining co-ordinated manipulation of social networking platforms via automated accounts and financial violations concerning Mr. Georgescu's campaign. Two days later, acting *ex officio* on the basis of these reports, the CCR annulled the presidential election, and ordered a re-run of the electoral process.<sup>5</sup> This decision was taken amid preparations for the second round and after out-of-country voting had already commenced.<sup>6</sup> Many ODIHR LEOM interlocutors,

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<sup>1</sup> See previous ODIHR election observation reports on [Romania](#).

<sup>2</sup> Other notable presidential candidates were then-Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu of the PSD (19.15 per cent), George Simion of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR; 13.86 per cent), Nicolae Ciucă of the PNL (8.79 per cent), independent candidate Mircea Geoană (6.32 per cent), Hunor Kelemen of RMDSZ/UDMR (4.50 per cent). The Constitutional Court disqualified the candidacy of Diana Șoșoacă of S.O.S. Romania.

<sup>3</sup> Allegations included undisclosed campaign funding, unlawful third-party involvement, and online interference from abroad aimed at manipulating voters.

<sup>4</sup> This followed a recount of all votes cast, in response to a formal complaint.

<sup>5</sup> Following the annulment, the European Commission [opened an investigation](#) into TikTok concerning allegations of foreign information manipulation and interference and undisclosed paid political content. TikTok [reported](#) that it was cooperating with the investigation and had removed a total of 27,217 inauthentic accounts forming a network that "attempted to promote the AUR political party and, to a smaller extent, the independent candidate Călin Georgescu".

<sup>6</sup> On 6 March 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) [rejected](#) as inadmissible an application filed by Mr. Georgescu to overturn the annulment of the presidential election process.

while acknowledging the need to address public concerns related to the integrity of the election, noted that the CCR decision lacked sufficient information on the nature and impact of the detected irregularities, as well as the legal basis for the annulment, which, in their view, affected public trust in some state institutions.

The annulment prompted a range of reactions, including criticism from across the political spectrum.<sup>7</sup> In January 2025, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) issued an urgent opinion on the annulment of election results by constitutional courts, emphasizing the need for clear legal regulation.<sup>8</sup> On 8 January, the government scheduled the repeat presidential election for 4 May.<sup>9</sup> On 10 February, President Iohannis resigned, and Senate President Ilie Bolojan assumed the role of acting president, as prescribed by the Constitution. On 26 February, the Prosecutors' Office opened a criminal investigation into Mr Georgescu's campaign, on suspicion of several offences, including campaign finance violations, incitement to actions against the constitutional order, dissemination of false information, and involvement in establishing an organization with a fascist, racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic character.

Following the 2024 parliamentary elections, women hold 22.4 per cent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 20.3 per cent in the Senate; only 2 out of 18 ministers (11 per cent) are women. Despite constitutional provisions for equal rights for men and women, entrenched gender stereotypes and the limited scope and implementation of legal provisions aimed at promoting gender equality continue to hinder women's political participation. Many ODIHR LEOM interlocutors noted that further steps are needed by the authorities and political parties to promote women's leadership and ensure greater representation of women in decision-making positions.

#### IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The presidential election is primarily regulated by the 1991 Constitution (as amended), the 2004 Law on the Election of the President of Romania (PEL), the 2015 Law for the Election of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (Parliamentary Elections Law), the 2015 Law on Postal Voting, and the 2006 Law on Financial Activity of Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns (Political Finance Law).<sup>10</sup> In addition, European Union (EU)-level regulations, such as the 2022 Digital Services Act (DSA) and the 2016 EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), are directly applicable.<sup>11</sup>

Government emergency ordinances (GEOs), a constitutional mechanism intended for exceptional situations, have been frequently used to amend legislation, including on electoral matters.<sup>12</sup> On 16 January, the government issued GEO No. 1/2025, introducing changes to political advertising regulations, the composition of election bodies, and polling hours abroad, applicable only to this

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<sup>7</sup> Before the annulment, demonstrators gathered across the country on several occasions to oppose extremism. Numerous rallies opposing the annulment decision, mainly organized by far-right groups and supporters of Mr. Georgescu, were also held in Bucharest and other cities.

<sup>8</sup> The [Urgent Report](#) "drawing from the recent Romanian case", concludes that *ex officio* annulments of elections by a constitutional court must be clearly regulated by law, used only in exceptional circumstances, based on concrete evidence, and must ensure procedural guarantees, including the right to a hearing, to present evidence, and to appeal.

<sup>9</sup> In parallel, partial local elections will be held for the president of the Bihor County Council and 17 mayoral positions.

<sup>10</sup> Other relevant laws include the 2002 Law on Radio and Television Broadcasting (Audiovisual Law), the 1992 Law on the Constitutional Court, as well as relevant provisions of the Criminal Code. The legal framework also includes regulations of election management bodies.

<sup>11</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/900 on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, is not yet in force at the EU level; however, some of its definitions are considered effective in Romania under GEO No. 1/2025. Romania has also ratified key international and regional human rights instruments related to the conduct of democratic elections.

<sup>12</sup> The Venice Commission has expressed concern that such use of GEOs can undermine legal certainty, the quality of legislation, and democratic principles. See paragraph 46 of the 2025 [Opinion on the emergency ordinance regarding the merger of the 2024 elections for the European Parliament and for the local authorities](#).

electoral process. There was no consultation with the public or relevant stakeholders prior to the issuance of the GEO, an issue criticized by many ODIHR LEOM interlocutors.<sup>13</sup>

The electoral legal framework is further complemented by rulings of the CCR. Some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors, including representatives of the authorities, stated that the CCR has effectively amended the Constitution and legislation through its rulings on multiple occasions, including electoral matters. According to these interlocutors, recent CCR decisions related to candidate registration requirements and the *ex officio* annulment of the election, contributed to legal uncertainty.

The legal framework for the presidential election has remained unchanged since the last election, with the exception of the amendments introduced by GEO No. 1/2025. Most previous ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed, including those on consolidating the electoral legislation, ensuring transparency in election administration, establishing clear procedures for verifying support signatures, and providing access for observers to all stages of the electoral process. Several ODIHR LEOM interlocutors also view the legal framework as partially outdated, noting in particular the lack of sufficient detail to address emerging challenges such as the use of digital technology in electoral processes and campaigns.

The president is directly elected for a five-year term by an absolute majority of registered voters. If no candidate receives such a majority in the first round, a second round is held two weeks later between the two candidates with the highest number of votes. The candidate who obtains the most votes cast in the second round is elected.<sup>14</sup>

## V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The presidential election is administered by the Permanent Electoral Authority (PEA) and a three-tiered structure of electoral bureaus established for each election, led by the Central Electoral Bureau (CEB).<sup>15</sup> The parliament elects the president of the PEA, while the prime minister and the president of the country each appoint a vice-president for eight-year terms.<sup>16</sup> The CEB may include up to 18 members: 5 High Court judges selected by lot, the PEA president and vice-presidents, and up to ten party representatives.<sup>17</sup> Under GEO No. 1/2025, parliamentary parties may nominate bureau members at all levels, regardless of whether they have nominated candidates; parties not represented in the parliament have limited representation, and independent candidates are not represented. The PEA management includes no women, while 6 of the 18 CEB members (33 per cent) are women.

The mid-level election administration comprises 48 County Election Bureaus (CoEBs), including one for out-of-country and postal voting. Each CoEB has up to 11 members: 3 judges from local courts, 1 PEA representative, and up to 7 parliamentary party nominees. Women comprise 35 per cent of the CoEB members. Election-day procedures will be administered by 18,979 Electoral Bureaus for Polling Stations (EBs), including 965 abroad in 95 countries. Each EB may include up to 9 members: a

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<sup>13</sup> GEOs take effect immediately upon submission to Parliament and remain in force unless rejected. Both chambers must approve a GEO for it to become permanent law, but there is no deadline for the second chamber to do so. GEO No. 1/2025 was tacitly adopted by the Senate and is currently pending approval in the Chamber of Deputies.

<sup>14</sup> The president's key responsibilities include nominating a candidate for prime minister and appointing the government, based on a parliamentary vote. The president also serves as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and presides over the Supreme Council of National Defence.

<sup>15</sup> Among other responsibilities, the PEA maintains a roster of electoral officials, trains polling station members, and oversees campaign finance, while the CEB manages candidate registration, adjudicates most complaints, as well as aggregates and determines election results. CoEBs implement the process at county level.

<sup>16</sup> On 28 February, the parliament dismissed the PEA president, a decision based on findings that he had an excessive allowance, authorized the costly relocation of the institution's headquarters, and made public statements deemed incompatible with his role. The deputy chair assumed the position of interim president.

<sup>17</sup> The CEB president and its deputy are elected by the appointed judges from among themselves, by secret ballot.

chairperson and a deputy, selected by lot from a roster on 4 April, and up to 7 political party nominees, to be appointed by 22 April. Some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors expressed concern about the lack of representation in CoEBs and EBs for presidential candidates not supported by parliamentary parties.<sup>18</sup>

To date, the election administration has met legal deadlines. Since the announcement of the election, the CEB and the PEA adopted various regulations, including on the election timeline and budget, campaign regulations, and candidate registration. Election bureaus at all levels hold regular sessions; however, these are closed to the public, despite prior ODIHR recommendations. Further, there is no comprehensive legal or regulatory guidance on what kind of information should be published concerning the activities of the election administration, or how it should be made public, which has led to inconsistencies in some cases.

The PEA is holding a cascade training for all levels of the election administration, excluding members appointed by political parties; a number of these trainings held to date have been observed by the ODIHR LEOM.<sup>19</sup> To date, the PEA has conducted voter education primarily through online video spots. The law and PEA regulations require polling stations to be accessible to voters with physical disabilities, who may also vote at designated barrier-free polling stations or using a mobile ballot box. The PEA informed the ODIHR LEOM that it had consulted with disability organizations on accessibility measures. It plans to implement a pilot project for introducing information materials in different formats for voters with disabilities.

## VI. VOTER RIGHTS AND REGISTRATION

Citizens aged 18 years or older on election day are eligible to vote. Voting rights may be revoked by a court decision on the grounds of conviction for certain criminal offences or legal incapacity, at odds with previous ODIHR recommendations.<sup>20</sup> Voter registration is passive and continuous. The PEA maintains the voter register, which is based on data from the national civil registry and other state institutions.<sup>21</sup> Voters can verify their registration data online or in person at mayoral and PEA offices, and could request corrections up until 20 March. Automatic updates to the voter register are made until 30 April. Electoral contestants have the right to request extracts from the voter register for verification purposes.

In presidential election, voters may cast their ballot at any polling station outside their territorial unit, including abroad, without submitting a prior request.<sup>22</sup> Out-of-country voting takes place in embassies, consulates and other designated locations two days before and on election day.<sup>23</sup> Postal voting is also available for voters abroad, provided they submitted an application by 20 March.<sup>24</sup> Voters with reduced mobility can request voting at home by special ballot box or they can vote at any polling station that provides accessibility. To prevent multiple voting and facilitate the transmission of preliminary results, the PEA operates the Information System for Monitoring Turnout and Preventing Illegal Voting (SIMPV) across all polling stations, which verifies voter eligibility, registers voters who have voted, facilitates video-recording of the vote count, and verifies the arithmetic consistency of result protocols

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<sup>18</sup> At CoEB level, parties that nominated Mr. Antonescu comprise 43 per cent of party-appointed membership, followed by those supporting Mr. Simion (28 per cent), and Ms. Lasconi (14 per cent). Some CoEBs informed the ODIHR LEOM long-term observers (LTOs) that the resignation rate among the selected chairpersons and deputies has increased compared to previous elections, explained by low remuneration and overlapping Easter holidays.

<sup>19</sup> Half of the remuneration will be withheld in cases of non-attendance.

<sup>20</sup> For these elections, 12,604 voters are disenfranchised due to legal incapacity and 1,016 due to criminal convictions.

<sup>21</sup> Including the Directorate of Persons Record and Databases Management, the General Directorate for Passports, the National Authority for Citizenship, and municipal authorities.

<sup>22</sup> Supplementary voter lists are compiled for all voters abroad and those voting outside their polling stations.

<sup>23</sup> GEO No. 1/2025 set 21:00 Bucharest time as the uniform closing hour for polling stations abroad. If voters are queuing at closing time, by law, any polling station may extend voting by up to three hours.

<sup>24</sup> Some 6,200 voters applied for voting by post.

prior to submission. As of 31 March, the PEA reported a total of 19,002,652 registered voters, including 1,004,188 residing abroad. Women constitute 51.77 per cent of in-country voters.

## VII. CANDIDATE RIGHTS AND REGISTRATION

Citizens over 35 years of age who have the right to vote and permanently reside in Romania, are eligible to stand.<sup>25</sup> Candidates may be nominated by political parties or coalitions, or run independently. Nomination documents, including at least 200,000 support signatures from voters, had to be submitted to the CEB by 15 March. By law, voters may sign in support of multiple nominees.

At odds with a previous ODIHR recommendation, the legislation does not comprehensively regulate the procedure for collecting and verifying signatures, some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors noted that this leaves room for inconsistent application by the CEB and misuse by candidates.<sup>26</sup> Pursuant to CCR Ruling No. 4/2019, which established that the CEB has no competence to verify the authenticity of submitted signatures, the CEB limits its review to assessing compliance of the signature lists with formal requirements; a point of concern for several ODIHR LEOM interlocutors. This process was not open to citizen observers, and candidate representatives were permitted to observe only the verification of signatures submitted in support of their own candidacy. In two instances, the CEB referred suspected irregularities to the Prosecutor's Office, which stated that investigations are at an early stage.<sup>27</sup> Nominees are also required to submit property declarations and statements confirming that they did not collaborate with Romania's pre-1990 intelligence service.

The CEB registered 12 out of the 25 prospective candidates. Thirteen candidatures were rejected on the grounds that the nominees either did not meet the required criteria or submitted incomplete documentation. Of these, 11 were rejected on technical grounds, while 2 applications were rejected by the CEB, on the basis of CCR rulings, including Decision No. 2 of 5 October 2024, which held that at the time of nomination, candidates must meet the requirements reflected in the presidential oath, including respect for the Constitution and the defence of democracy.<sup>28</sup> The CCR received 61 appeals concerning the registration of 11 candidates and the rejection of 8 nominees. In all cases, the CCR rejected the appeals and upheld the respective CEB decisions. Four additional appeals were deemed inadmissible due to procedural omissions.

On 20 March, one candidate withdrew, leaving 11 contestants on the ballot, including 2 women.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Individuals holding certain civil service positions, such as judges of the CCR, the ombudsperson, magistrates, and active members of the armed forces or police, are not eligible to stand as candidates unless they resign.

<sup>26</sup> A CEB decision on support signatures defines some specific aspects, such as the templates for signature collection and submission, the liability of signature collectors, and the presence of candidate representatives during verification.

<sup>27</sup> In its Decision 4/2019, the CCR ruled that the CEB lacks the competence to determine if a list of supporters was forged.

<sup>28</sup> In the case of Diana Șoșoacă, the CEB rejected the nomination on the grounds that the CCR, in Decision No. 2/2024, had determined that the candidate's conduct and statements were contrary to constitutional principles and values. In the case of Călin Georgescu, the CEB referred to CCR Decision No. 32/2024, which annulled the 2024 presidential election on the basis that the candidate had failed to comply with the law, breaching the obligation to defend democracy. The CEB concluded that it could not establish that the same candidate now met the required conditions.

<sup>29</sup> These are Cristian-Vasile Terheș (PNCR), Elena-Valerina Lasconi (USR), George Crin Laurențiu Antonescu (Romania Forward Electoral Alliance, A.RO), George-Nicolae Simion (AUR), John-Ion Banu-Muscel (independent), Marcela-Lavinia Șandru (Social Liberal Humanist Party, PUSL), Nicușor-Daniel Dan (independent), Petru-Daniel Funeriu (independent), Sebastian-Constantin Popescu (PNR), Silviu Predoiu (PLAN), Victor-Viorel Ponta (independent). On 10 April, USR announced their support for Mr. Dan instead of Ms. Lasconi. On 12 April, acting upon a complaint submitted by AUR, the CEB ruled that USR must remove all of its online campaign materials, on the basis that the law prohibits parties from promoting a different candidate after the withdrawal deadline.

## VIII. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The official campaign period commenced on 4 April. Most candidates have engaged voters primarily through social media, and to a much lesser extent, through posters and leaflets, as well as occasional larger rallies.<sup>30</sup> Some candidates began campaigning prior to the official start date, in a period not subject to campaign regulations (also see *Campaign Finance*). To date, campaign discourse has largely focused on anti-corruption, national and religious identity, values identified as traditional, and criticism of the political establishment, in particular concerning the annulment of the 2024 presidential election, while offering limited concrete policy proposals.

The Law on the Election of the President of Romania and the Political Finance Law guarantee freedom of opinion and expression during the campaign, as well as equal access of contestants to media, campaign venues and spaces.<sup>31</sup> Regulations introduced through GEO No. 1/2025 and PEA Decision No. 9/2025, broadened the definition of political advertising to include various forms of online content and indirect promotion of contestants and introduced expanded labelling requirements for written, audio, video, and online campaign materials.<sup>32</sup> Several ODIHR LEOM interlocutors find the new labelling requirements to be overly burdensome, and question their effectiveness in addressing violations online, including co-ordinated manipulation of social networking platforms. The ODIHR LEOM observed several campaign materials, mainly online and on television, that did not comply with the labelling requirements.<sup>33</sup>

The legislation includes limited safeguards against the misuse of administrative resources. It prohibits the use of technical, financial, or human resources of public institutions to support political parties or candidates, as well as free services or donations by public bodies. Public officials may campaign only in a personal capacity and without using official resources or while performing official functions.

The regulatory framework for online campaigning is primarily governed by the DSA, which requires Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) to assess the risks of any actual or foreseeable negative effects on civic discourse, electoral processes, and public security arising from their operations.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, in March 2024, Law 50/2024 was adopted to implement the DSA at the national level, while in January 2025, GEO No. 1/2025 introduced further regulations that also apply to online campaigns. Before the official campaign period began, the National Audiovisual Council (CNA), acting upon notifications, addressed alleged violations related to online audiovisual content, including materials posted by individuals on social networking platforms. Some removal orders were criticized

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<sup>30</sup> CEB Decision No. 54D of 26 March sets out a detailed list of banned campaign tools, including vehicles, tents, banners, flags, screens, billboards, and other structures displaying slogans or images.

<sup>31</sup> The legislation prohibits the use of the Romanian and other national flags for campaign purposes, as well as hate speech and the glorification of war criminals.

<sup>32</sup> The decision requires political actors to clearly label each printed, broadcast, or online campaign material, as political advertising, specifying the sponsor, whether targeting or distribution techniques were used, confirm that only legal funding sources were involved, state whether the material was paid or free of charge, and include the financial agent's identification code. Printed materials must also indicate the producer and the print run. On 12 April, more than a week after the campaign started, the PEA issued interpretative [guidelines](#) concerning the labelling of political advertising and election propaganda materials.

<sup>33</sup> Some observed posts by five presidential candidates and one party lacked the required labelling when first published. Certain live video streams omitted the mandatory spoken disclaimer at the beginning. In other cases, labelling did not comply with formatting requirements.

<sup>34</sup> VLOPs are platforms having at least 10 per cent of the EU population using them monthly (i.e. 45 million people). The major VLOPs in Romania are Facebook and TikTok, with smaller numbers of people using Instagram and X. Transparency reports by VLOPs under the DSA are published by the [European Commission](#), with Meta and X's most recent reporting going up to 30 September 2024, and [TikTok's](#) to 31 December 2024.



by media freedom organizations as potentially infringing on freedom of expression, with concerns raised that the CNA may have exceeded its mandate.<sup>35</sup>

On 26 March, the CEB established the inter-institutional Working Group for Online Campaign to handle complaints of online campaign violations and to instruct VLOPs to remove unlawful content. Some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors expressed concerns about the CEB's limited mandate and questioned its capacity to detect foreign influence and inauthentic accounts. Any citizen can submit complaints online, including anonymously. The Working Group operates 24 hours a day and comprises representatives of the CEB, PEA, the Cyber Security Directorate, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs, Audiovisual Council, and the National Communication Agency (ANCOM). The Group examines complaints and prepares case files on alleged violations. Based on these case files, the CEB may dismiss the complaint, refer the matter to the police or instruct the VLOPs, through the PEA, to remove content. Under CEB decision No. 54D, VLOPs have five hours to comply with notifications, in line with the process established by the DSA.<sup>36</sup> The Working Group is not mandated to proactively monitor online platforms.

As of 14 April, the CEB had published 248 decisions related to campaign violations on social networking platforms, resulting in 178 orders to remove 629 posts, mainly due to missing labelling, as required by PEA Decision No. 9/2025. All related decisions are published online but CEB's decision-making sessions are not public, a point of concern for some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors, who note that the lack of open sessions and some content removals, which were perceived to be disproportionate, has led to claims of censorship.<sup>37</sup>

The ODIHR LEOM is monitoring the campaign on social networks for a qualitative assessment of its narrative and tone.<sup>38</sup>

## IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance is regulated by the Political Finance Law, supplemented by regulations of the PEA. Campaign finance regulations are also applicable to online activities. The campaign finance-related legal framework has remained unchanged since the last elections, leaving most prior ODIHR recommendations unaddressed, including those related to strengthening accountability of campaign finance through improved reporting and oversight mechanisms.

Political parties are eligible to receive state funding, based on their vote share obtained in parliamentary and local elections.<sup>39</sup> Presidential campaigns may be financed by political parties, including with their public funds, as well as by candidates' own resources, loans, and individual donations within

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<sup>35</sup> See a [press release](#) by ActiveWatch of 1 April, where the media NGO publicly criticized the CNA for exceeding its mandate by attempting to regulate all online video content, warning that such an approach risks enabling censorship.

<sup>36</sup> Previously, a working group was established in February 2025 by the National Communications Authority (ANCOM) bringing together civil society organizations, the VLOPs and state authorities to co-ordinate implementation of the DSA regulations. During the campaign period, in addition to the internal processes of the VLOPs, several civil society organizations including Funky Citizens, ActiveWatch and Expert Forum began identifying online disinformation.

<sup>37</sup> See the [response](#) of Association for Technology and Internet (ApTI) to some removal orders taken by the CEB.

<sup>38</sup> On 3 April, the ODIHR LEOM commenced its monitoring of the campaign on social networks. The analysis includes a sample of the accounts of more than 60 contestants, authorities and influencers, whose activities are followed on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and X.

<sup>39</sup> According to the PEA Department for the Control of Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns' Financing, in its [Annual Report for 2024](#), political parties received a total of RON 382.4 million (around EUR 76.4 million) from the state budget. The three main recipients of public subsidies were SDP (RON 152.9 million), the PNL (RON 122 million), and USR (RON 65.2 million).

established limits.<sup>40</sup> Private companies may donate to political parties but not to presidential candidates. For the upcoming election, the ceiling for campaign contributions is set at RON 81 million (around EUR 16.2 million) per contestant.<sup>41</sup> Presidential candidates are eligible for reimbursement of campaign expenses up to the same ceiling if they secure at least three per cent of the valid votes.

In the month preceding the official start of the campaign, most political parties and presidential candidates incurred advertising expenses. According to publicly available data, social networking platforms belonging to Meta reported political advertising spending for March totalling approximately RON 2.5 million (around EUR 508,000).<sup>42</sup> Campaign finance regulations only apply to the official campaign period, starting 30 days before election day. Several ODIHR LEOM interlocutors noted that this can potentially facilitate the circumvention of spending limits and transparency requirements, as a number of candidates campaigned before the start of the official campaign period.

Contestants are required to open a designated bank account for all campaign-related funds and to report campaign contributions and expenditures, including online, to the PEA within three days of each transaction. Although not legally required to do so, the PEA began publishing reported campaign contribution and expenditure data on 11 April. Final financial reports must be submitted within 30 days after election day. The PEA reviews compliance and publishes the final reports with conclusions, within a further 60 days. For suspected irregularities, the PEA may request clarification from relevant public authorities or banking institutions. Where non-compliance is established, the PEA may impose administrative sanctions or refer the matter for criminal prosecution. However, it is not mandated to verify the veracity of reported figures beyond the supporting documentation provided, which, according to several ODIHR LEOM interlocutors, may allow for inaccurately disclosed financial activity.

## X. MEDIA

The media landscape is diverse with numerous public and private television, radio stations, and online news portals. Television remains the main source of political information, with online media consumption at a comparable level. Recent research shows an overall decline of trust in news across all platforms.<sup>43</sup> While the environment is generally considered conducive to media freedom, many ODIHR LEOM interlocutors raised concerns about the lack of transparency in media financing, noting that extensive party funding of media content undermines journalistic independence, contributes to self-censorship, and facilitates clientelism between political parties and the media.<sup>44</sup> In recent years, there have been a number of attacks and pressure on journalists, including smear campaigns and instances of surveillance.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Donations from foreign entities, trade unions, religious organizations, public institutions, and state-owned enterprises are prohibited.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Romanian Leu (RON) = EUR 0.20.

<sup>42</sup> Based on [Meta Ad Library](#), in March, most political parties and independent candidates incurred advertising costs. Of this, Mr. Dan accounted for almost RON 950,000 (EUR 190,000), followed by Mr. Antonescu with RON 685,000 (EUR 137,000). Prominent individuals, including party leaders, and others affiliated with parties, spent approximately RON 905,000 (around EUR 181,000), of which RON 225,790 (around EUR 45,160) was spent by Mr. Ponta, and RON 111,726 (around EUR 22,445) by Mr. Simion.

<sup>43</sup> See the EU [2023 Media & News Eurobarometer Survey](#) and the Reuters Institute [Digital News Report 2024](#).

<sup>44</sup> The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [resolution](#) 2466 (2022), states that “the use of public funds by political parties to finance media and influence their content on the basis of secret contracts is of the utmost concern”.

<sup>45</sup> The [CoE Safety of Journalist Platform](#) lists two attacks on journalists in 2025. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and six other media freedom organizations raised concerns over a recent case of [surveillance](#) involving a journalist. In a separate [case](#), an investigative journalist and university lecturer has been the target of an ongoing smear campaign since 2022.

The Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and the right to information, and prohibits censorship. Defamation is decriminalized. The Criminal Code and the Law on Romania's Cybersecurity and Defence define disinformation as a criminal offence when it undermines national security or democracy. The Audiovisual Law and its implementing Audiovisual Code establish the legal framework and operating rules for radio and television broadcasting, including oversight, monitoring, and sanctions by the media regulator, the CNA. The broadcasters are required to ensure fair, balanced, and impartial campaign coverage, and both public and private broadcasters must provide equal and free access to airtime for all presidential candidates.<sup>46</sup> On 26 February, the CNA adopted a regulation for the coverage of the presidential campaign.<sup>47</sup> Under this regulation, campaign coverage is permitted only in three kinds of programmes: electoral promotion, electoral debate and informative programmes – each subject to distinct labelling requirements.<sup>48</sup>

The CNA monitors broadcasters' compliance with campaign coverage requirements by analyzing data from broadcasters.<sup>49</sup> It can issue sanctions based on its own monitoring or on complaints. By law, the sanctions imposed for violations of electoral campaign rules are lower than those for other offences and do not take into account repeated violations committed by the same outlet on other grounds. Since the beginning of the campaign period, the CNA has not informed the public about any complaints regarding election-related content, and it issued one sanction related to the publication of a public opinion poll bearing misleading labelling. Some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors voiced concerns about the CNA's limited oversight capacity and an ineffective sanctioning mechanism, with fines considered too low to be dissuasive.

On 4 April, ODIHR LEOM commenced its quantitative and qualitative monitoring of six TV stations.<sup>50</sup>

## XI. PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

According to census data, non-majority ethnic citizens constitute over 10 per cent of the population, with the largest minority groups being Hungarians (6 per cent) and Roma (3.4 per cent). The Constitution guarantees the rights of national minorities, including the right to political representation and the use of minority languages in education and in communication with local authorities where over 20 per cent of the population use the language.<sup>51</sup> Twenty ethnic groups are each guaranteed a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, with their representatives elected without being subject to the electoral threshold applied to political parties.

The legal framework does not specifically require the provision of electoral materials or voter education in minority languages, and the PEA informed that such materials will not be made available for the upcoming contest. No candidates belonging to national minorities are standing for this election.

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<sup>46</sup> The CNA [registered](#) 230 broadcasters intending to cover the election. Candidates seeking airtime on private channels must contact broadcasters directly, who then submit programme schedules to the CNA.

<sup>47</sup> [CNA Decision No. 86/2025](#) reiterates that private broadcasters must provide airtime in proportion to the allocations made by public broadcasters. During the campaign period, the public broadcaster Romanian Television (*TVR*) allocates two minutes of free electoral promotion daily to each candidate, for a total of 30 minutes per candidate. Political parties, coalitions, and national minority organizations supporting candidates may purchase airtime on private broadcasters.

<sup>48</sup> Electoral promotion and electoral debate programmes must be clearly indicated as such. Electoral advertising spots may not exceed 30 seconds each, and must be available to all candidates on equal terms. Electoral promotion programmes and advertising spots must be labelled, according to GEO No. 1/2025.

<sup>49</sup> Broadcasters must submit weekly reports indicating the number of minutes allocated to each candidate in news programmes and the number of appearances in debates, which will be verified by the CNA's monitoring unit.

<sup>50</sup> The public broadcaster *TVRI* and private *ProTV*, *Digi24 TV*, *Romania TV*, *Antena 3 CNN*, *Realitatea Plus TV*.

<sup>51</sup> In addition, Romania has ratified the Council of Europe's [Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#).

RMDSZ/UDMR is actively campaigning in Hungarian for the coalition government's candidate, who is also supported by all other minority parties. Despite efforts to address discrimination, including the 2021 legislation prohibiting 'antigypsyism', Roma continue to be underrepresented in public and political life. Several ODIHR LEOM interlocutors raised concerns that Roma communities face limited access to public services, as well as a lack of personal documentation, which may effectively prevent them from exercising their right to vote.

## **XII. ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

Complaints and appeals are adjudicated by both the electoral bureaus and judicial authorities. Complaints regarding decisions or inactions by electoral bureaus can be submitted to the respective bureaus and may be appealed to the next-higher level bureau. Under GEO 1/2025, the CEB is responsible for handling complaints related to violations involving VLOPs, and is required to issue a decision on the same day. Complaints against PEA decisions on campaign finance violations may be filed with the respective Court of Appeal, whose decisions can be further challenged before the High Court of Cassation and Justice. Complaints concerning campaign violations can be filed to CoEBs, whose decisions can be appealed to the CEB, while obstruction of the campaign may be brought before the CCR. The law establishes an expeditious procedure, requiring that appeals and decisions be resolved within one to three days.

While the legislation suggests that most CEB decisions are final, the CCR interprets its competence as that of a court of last resort in instances where no other remedy is available, covering all stages of the electoral process.<sup>52</sup> The CCR also oversees the compliance of the electoral process with both statutory and constitutional provisions, and confirms the election results. In addition, it is competent to adjudicate complaints related to candidate registration and challenges to election results.

By 14 April, the CEB received 12 complaints concerning the composition of electoral bureaus, all of which were rejected, as well as 263 complaints related to campaigning on VLOPs. Eight of these CEB decisions were contested at the Bucharest Court of Appeal, which upheld two of them, while the other six are still in process. Lower-level bureaus published 26 decisions adjudicating complaints and appeals, mainly related to appointment of EBs. Overall, most ODIHR LEOM interlocutors have expressed trust in the efficiency of the dispute resolution system and the impartiality of the adjudicating bodies; however, some raised concerns about the adjudication of online campaign-related complaints by the CEB.

## **XIII. ELECTION OBSERVATION**

The law provides for both citizen and international observation. It permits observation of election day procedures and certain aspects of postal voting, but does not regulate access to other stages of the electoral process. To be accredited, organizations must demonstrate engagement in the promotion of democracy and be legally established six months prior to election day. Political parties and coalitions that nominated candidates but lack representatives in the EBs may delegate proxies to observe election day procedures.<sup>53</sup> This right is not extended to independent candidates.

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<sup>52</sup> See the CCR [Ruling 66/2019](#) of 1 October 2019, paragraphs 22 and 23. Exceptions to the general finality of CEB decisions include those concerning the establishment of electoral bureaus and pre-electoral coalitions, which, by law, may be challenged before the High Court of Cassation and Justice, as well as CEB decisions on complaints related to online campaign violations, which may, under GEO No. 1/2025, be challenged to the Bucharest Court of Appeal.

<sup>53</sup> The PEA accredits citizen and international observers, as well as foreign media, while political party agents are accredited by the CoEBs.

Despite reported operational and financial limitations linked to the number of elections held in 2024 as well as international developments, the largest citizen observer coalition, VotCorect plans to deploy observers on election day and operate a citizen hotline. Other observer organizations, some of which will also deploy observers, focus on specific aspects of the process, with Transparency International Romania monitoring campaign and party finance, and Funky Citizens, primarily focusing on the online environment and the legal framework.

#### **XIV. ODIHR LEOM ACTIVITIES**

The ODIHR LEOM formally opened in Bucharest with a press conference on 25 March. It established regular contacts with the PEA, the CEB, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other high-level state officials, as well as candidates and other representatives of political parties, the media, civil society, and members of the diplomatic and international community.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) has announced its intention to deploy an observer delegation.

*The English version of this report is the only official document.  
An unofficial translation is available in Romanian.*