

Far-Right Gains in Romania Could Advance Kremlin Objectives

By Christina Harward

Key Takeaway: A far-right candidate, George Simion, won the first round of the May 4 presidential election in Romania. Simion's first round victory comes after another far-right candidate, Calin Georgescu, won the November 2024 first round presidential election that Romanian authorities later annulled due to likely Russian interference. Simion has called for the cessation of Romanian aid to Ukraine and Romanian territorial expansion — policies that would support the Kremlin's objectives in Ukraine and Kremlin narratives about Ukraine and Moldova. Simion, unlike Georgescu, has expressed support for Romania's continued participation in a US-led NATO as a means of deterrence against possible future Russian aggression, however. Simion nevertheless continues to support Georgescu, stating that he would consider Georgescu for the prime minister position. It remains unclear if Georgescu could secure the necessary parliamentary approval, but the current ruling coalition appears to be fracturing following the May 4 vote.

George Simion, the head of the ultranationalist Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) political party, won the first round of the Romanian presidential election on May 4 with 40.96 percent of the vote.^[1] Simion will face Nicusor Dan, who secured 20.99 percent of the vote, in the second round on May 18. Dan, the mayor of Bucharest, founded the reformist Save Romania Union (USR) and supports increased Romanian defense spending and continued support for Ukraine.^[2] Crin Antonescu came in third with 20.07 percent of the vote.^[3] Antonescu received endorsements from the three parties that currently form the majority coalition in the parliament — the center-left Social Democratic Party (PSD), center-right National Liberal Party (PNL), and the Hungarian minority's Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR).^[4] Antonescu has stated that he would continue to support Ukraine "logistically and politically" but does not support sending Romanian peacekeepers to Ukraine.^[5]

The Romanian Constitutional Court annulled the results of the first round of the presidential election in November 2024 following the declassification of Romanian intelligence documents outlining likely Russian electoral interference and effective large-scale TikTok campaigns.^[6] TikTok stated in March 2025 that it had removed more than 27,000 fake accounts that were promoting the AUR party.^[7] TikTok also hired more content moderators and created a Romanian election task force focused on "covert influence campaigns and advertising integrity" ahead of the May 2025 presidential election. ISW has not observed reports as of this writing that social media campaigns on TikTok or other platforms helped any candidates in the May 2025 election gain a significant advantage.

Romania suffered from cyberattacks indirectly tied to Russia during the May 4 first round election as in the November 2024 election. Romania's National Cyber Security Directorate reported on May 4 that pro-Russian hacker group NoName057(16) conducted DDoS attacks against several websites on election day, including the official website of the Romanian Government, Constitutional Court, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Senate as well

as the campaign websites of presidential candidates Crin Antonescu, Nicusor Dan, John Ion Banu-Muscel, and Silviu Predoiu.[8] NoName057(16) claimed responsibility for the attacks on their Telegram channel, stating that "Simion, who positions himself as an ally of [Russian President] Vladimir Putin, is considered the favorite" and that the group is "not standing aside." [9] NoName057(16) has previously conducted DDoS attacks against airports in Canada and bank websites in several European states due to these states' support for Ukraine.[10] NoName057(16) similarly targeted Moldovan websites in the months prior to the October 2024 Moldovan presidential election and referendum due to Moldova's alleged "Russophobic" government.[11]

Romania's Foreign Intelligence Service (SIE) stated in documents declassified in December 2024 that Russia targeted Romania with "aggressive" hybrid actions, including cyberattacks, during the November 2024 first round presidential election.[12] The Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority also suffered over 85,000 cyberattacks trying to gain access to the website's databases before, on, and after election day in November 2024, and the Romanian Information Service assessed that the responsible party was a state actor with considerable resources.

The election of Simion as president could advance the Kremlin's aim of reducing Western aid to Ukraine while Ukraine continues to defend against Russia's full-scale invasion or in the future following a peace settlement. Simion stated in March 2025 that he would not send military or financial aid to Ukraine if elected.[13] The Kremlin has demanded that Western states stop sending military aid to Ukraine during any future longer-term ceasefire — possibly to set conditions to demand the cessation of Western weapons supplies to Ukraine as a condition for Russia's acceptance of a full permanent ceasefire.[14] Romania has consistently supported Ukraine against Russia's full-scale invasion, particularly by providing a crucial Patriot air defense system and hosting F-16 pilots-in-training.[15] Romania also signed a bilateral security agreement with Ukraine in July 2024 under former Romanian President Klaus Iohannis.[16] Majorities in both houses of Romania's parliament approved the law to donate Romania's Patriot system to Ukraine and plans to train Ukrainian soldiers in central Romania.[17] The potential termination of Romanian aid to Ukraine under Simion could impact Ukraine's ability to defend against Russian aggression now and in the future.

Simion has previously expressed opinions about Ukraine's and Moldova's territorial integrity that parallel Kremlin narratives. Simion's AUR party has previously called for the restoration of Romania "within its natural borders," including by laying claim to areas in western Ukraine.[18] Simion threatened in an interview with the *Telegraph* in March 2025 that he would break Romania's defense cooperation treaty with the UK, under which the Romanian military trains Ukrainian forces in the UK and which includes a joint committee to coordinate support for Ukraine, unless Ukraine "learns how to behave and to respect the rights of...Romanian speakers in Ukraine." [19] Simion is banned from entering Ukraine, due to his "systematic anti-Ukrainian activities that are contrary to the national interests of Ukraine and encroach on its state sovereignty and territorial integrity." [20] Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) stated that Simion's statements aim to discredit Ukraine, deny the legitimacy of Ukraine's state borders, and allege that Ukrainian authorities

are violating the rights of the Romanian minority in Ukraine. Moldova has also banned Simion from entering the country, as Simion has previously labeled Moldova an "artificial state" and called for Moldovan–Romanian unification.^[21]

The *Financial Times* reported in March 2025 that Simion stated that he would "not talk about annexing territories" as it is not his "ideology" — an attempt to distance himself from his previous statements about reclaiming land in other states.^[22] Simion's previous statements about Ukraine mirror the Kremlin's attempted justification for its invasions of Ukraine, as Russia claims that it had to protect Russian-speaking minorities living in Ukraine from the Ukrainian government's alleged discriminatory practices. Simion's statements about Ukraine's and Moldova's territorial integrity mirror Kremlin claims that parts of Ukraine belong to other neighboring states and that former territories of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union are rightfully part of modern-day Russia.^[23]

Moldovan and Romanian officials have accused Simion of having ties to Russian intelligence but have not publicized evidence of these accusations. Former Moldovan Minister of Defense Anatol Salaru alleged in 2023 that Simion had ties to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), and President of the Joint Parliamentary Oversight Committee for the Romanian Intelligence Services (SRI) Ioan Chirtes similarly alleged in November 2024 that Simion had met with officers from the Russian General Staff's Main Directorate (GRU).^[24] Simion has denied these claims, and ISW has not observed Romanian or Moldovan authorities publicly providing evidence of these allegations.^[25] Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu stated in November 2024 that Simion is not a "spy" and did not meet with Russian intelligence agents.^[26]

Simion appears to support Romania's continued participation in NATO, particularly against future threats from Russia, however. NATO is building what will be its largest base in Romania near the Black Sea, and Simion has spoken out in support of US troops staying in Romania, stating that a US withdrawal from the country would be "dangerous."^[27] Simion stated that Romania would be in "big danger" without a US-led NATO and expressed support for US President Donald Trump's calls for European states to invest more in their own defense requirements.^[28] Simion stated that the large majority of Romanians support NATO and the EU, so "this is not something that we can negotiate."^[29] Simion told the *Financial Times* in March 2025 that "Putin's Russia" is one of the biggest threats for European states, including Romania, the Baltic states, and Poland.^[30] Simion stated that he wants "new security guarantees [for Romania] for the next 30 to 50 years" to prevent Russia from violating international treaties again.^[31] Simion supports sanctions against Russia as a way to protect against future Russian aggression.^[32]

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Simion maintains his support for Calin Georgescu, the pro-Russian ultranationalist candidate who unexpectedly won the later-annulled first round of the Romanian presidential election in November 2024. Georgescu explicitly expressed views opposing Ukraine, NATO, and the EU.[33] Simion endorsed Georgescu in the second round of voting before Romanian authorities annulled the election, even though Simion's views on Romania's support for NATO and US deployments to Romania vastly differ from those of Georgescu. Simion has recently suggested that he

would consider appointing Georgescu as prime minister should Simion become president and should Georgescu want the position, claiming that Georgescu "is wanted by Romanians" and that Romanians "voted for" Georgescu.[34]

The Romanian Parliament must approve any prime minister appointments, but the current governing coalition appears to be fracturing following the May 4 vote. The Romanian president appoints a candidate for prime minister in consultation with the parliamentary majority after which the parliament must approve the candidate.[35] The center-left PSD party, the center-right PNL party, and the UDMR party, which represents the Hungarian minority, formed the Electoral Alliance Romania Forward (A.RO) coalition and currently hold the majority in parliament. The coalition's hold on the majority in both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies is slim, however. The coalition currently does not include the reformist USR party — the party of Elena Lasconi, who came in second after Georgescu in the November 2024 first round presidential election but won only 2.68 percent in the May 4 election.[36] The USR was initially part of the coalition that formed to counter far-right parliamentary gains in the December 2024 parliamentary elections and Georgescu's possible election as president but later withdrew.[37]

Current Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu from the PSD party announced that he would resign on May 5, and all other PSD ministers will reportedly leave the government as well.[38] These moves come after Antonescu — the Electoral Alliance Romania Forward's candidate — failed to make the second round of the election. *Euronews* reported on May 5 that its source stated that PNL asked Ciolacu to resign and that the current interim president, Ilie Bolojan, take his place following an interim period of 45 days.[39] Bolojan will nominate and parliament will have to approve a new prime minister in the meantime, and PNL reportedly proposed Romanian Minister of Education Daniel David as the interim prime minister.[40] PSD's resignation from the current government and PNL's dissatisfaction with PSD may fracture the coalition and pave the way for the establishment of a new coalition in parliament. It remains unclear if a new coalition in the future could approve Georgescu's appointment as prime minister.

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