



## INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION Romania – Repeat Presidential Election, 4 May 2025

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### STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

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#### PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

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Recent efforts by state authorities to improve electoral integrity were notable, and the election was efficiently administered, however, the first round of the 2025 repeat presidential election was marked by insufficient oversight of key aspects of the campaign and concerns over the widespread use of inauthentic behaviour by candidates online. Fundamental freedoms of association and assembly were respected, and voters had a choice among political alternatives. While the legal framework provides an adequate basis for conducting democratic elections, recent changes did not sufficiently address the issues currently impacting public trust. The transparency in the work and decision-making of the election administration was limited. The use of eligibility requirements based on court rulings, rather than on clear legal provisions, detracted from the inclusivity of the candidate registration process. The authorities took a fragmented approach to overseeing the online space, which, together with a lack of information on the handling of reported violations, discouraged civic engagement and led to self-censorship. While the media landscape is diverse and the public broadcaster provided balanced coverage, many outlets reflected political affiliations, which limited voters' access to impartial information. Election day was orderly and efficiently administered, with some shortcomings noted, including some instances of compromised vote secrecy, campaign materials near polling stations, and the presence of unauthorized individuals inside polling stations.

The first round of the repeat presidential election, held on 4 May, followed the *ex officio* annulment of the 24 November 2024 election by the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) on the basis of coordinated manipulation on social networks and financial violations related to one candidate's campaign. The annulment prompted a range of reactions, including criticism from across the political spectrum over the lack of sufficient information on the nature and impact of the irregularities and the legal basis for the decision, and it also intensified public debate over safeguards of democratic processes.

The legal framework for the presidential election provides an adequate basis for conducting democratic elections but is overly complex, with gaps, inconsistencies, and a lack of clarity. The legislation remained largely unchanged since the last election, except for amendments by Government Emergency Ordinance (GEO) 1/2025, which introduced changes to political advertising regulations, the composition of election bureaus, voting hours abroad, as well as specific deadlines and avenues for adjudicating disputes related to online campaign violations. However, at odds with OSCE commitments and international good practice, the GEO was adopted without public consultation, only four months prior to the election, and has not effectively regulated other key concerns, such as the oversight of online political advertising and campaign finance. Further, in recent years, the government frequently amended laws via GEOs, while Constitutional Court rulings effectively amended the Constitution and legislation, both without parliamentary confirmation through legal amendments, challenging coherence and stability of the electoral legislation and the separation of powers. Most previous ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed, including those on consolidating electoral legislation, enhancing transparency in election administration, and establishing clear procedures for verifying candidate nomination support signatures.

The election was administered by the Permanent Electoral Authority (PEA) with a temporary structure of electoral bureaus led by the Central Electoral Bureau (CEB). The election administration efficiently managed preparations and met legal deadlines, although its work lacked transparency. Parties not

represented in parliament had limited, and independent candidates had no representation in election bureaus. Trainings for certain polling staff were generally comprehensive but at times lacked sufficient interaction and adequate equipment. Due to the exclusion of party-nominated members from official trainings and numerous last-minute replacements, a significant portion of polling staff remained untrained, diverting from international good practice. While the overall accessibility of electoral premises and materials remained limited, the PEA implemented a limited pilot project to introduce information materials in various formats for voters with disabilities at a number of polling stations.

Citizens at least 18 years old on election day are eligible to vote. Court decisions may revoke the right to vote due to legal incapacity, contrary to international standards. The voter register, maintained by the PEA, listed about 19 million eligible voters, including one million abroad. Most stakeholders expressed confidence in the register's accuracy and the safeguards ensuring its integrity. However, vulnerable groups, particularly Roma, may have faced administrative obstacles to obtaining permanent identity documents linked to a registered address, posing a potential barrier to exercising their voting rights.

Citizens over 35 years of age who have the right to vote and permanently reside in Romania are eligible to run for president. Nominees are required to submit 200,000 support signatures, a number considered too high under international good practice and assessed by some candidates as an excessive burden on their registration efforts. The law does not provide sufficiently detailed procedures for the collection or verification of support signatures, and the CEB's review was limited to formal compliance. The CEB registered 12 candidates out of 25 applicants and rejected 13 for not meeting eligibility or documentation requirements. Two nominees were rejected based on previous CCR rulings that concluded that they had not met constitutional requirements enshrined in the presidential oath. Overall, the application of eligibility criteria derived from CCR jurisprudence compromised transparency and legal predictability and did not provide safeguards against arbitrary application, which affected the inclusiveness of registration.

Two of the eleven presidential candidates were women. The Constitution provides for equal opportunities for women and men to hold public and elected office but enforcement of provisions to attain equality remains limited. Following the 2024 parliamentary elections, women hold 22 per cent of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, 20 per cent in the Senate, 11 per cent of ministerial posts, and about 7 per cent of mayoral positions.

During the campaign, fundamental freedoms of association and assembly were respected, and voters had a genuine choice between political alternatives. Most contestants positioned themselves as "anti-system" and criticized the political establishment, including for the annulment of the 2024 presidential election, and some presented competing concepts of national "identity" and "values". Concrete policy proposals until the final week of the campaign were limited. The law guarantees all candidates equal access to media and public spaces but significantly restricts traditional campaigning methods by limiting the types of permitted materials, and in practice, voter outreach via posters, leaflets, mailings, or public rallies was limited.

All contestants used social networking platforms and some also advertised online. The overall campaign environment was impacted by inauthentic behaviour, both in favour and against several individual candidates, in the online campaign. Under the EU Digital Services Act, Very Large Online Platforms took steps to counter inauthentic behaviour, but these were insufficient to address public concerns, and infrequent reporting obligations of the platforms further limited the transparency of their efforts. In a notable effort, various state institutions established procedures and structures, and identified and flagged more than 450 accounts and systemic disinformation issues; however, oversight of the online environment and campaigning remained split across institutions, resulting in a fragmented response and limited transparency. While cooperation with platforms improved, it remained inadequate, as content removals were not always done promptly and reposted or re-edited material often remained accessible.

By election day, the CEB published 1,479 decisions on complaints, mostly concerning online campaign materials published without the required labelling. In some decisions, the CEB's inconsistent or broad interpretation of "political actor" drew criticism from stakeholders as unduly restricting freedom of expression and resulting in self-censorship.

Campaign finance regulations, including online, apply only to the 30-day official campaign period, limiting their effectiveness in providing accountability. Presidential campaigns can be financed by political parties, as well as by candidates' own resources, loans, and individual donations. Annual state funding allocated to political parties and the campaign spending ceiling are unreasonably high, not in line with international standards. Contrary to international good practice, the law does not grant the PEA an explicit mandate to audit campaign finance reports beyond the documentation provided, and the existing sanctions are not sufficiently dissuasive. During the campaign period, the PEA conducted financial compliance checks into three contestants' accounts for possible violations of the Political Finance Law. Despite limitations in resources, the PEA's approach in overseeing certain campaign finance-related issues shortly before election day was a positive step to enhance transparency.

Freedom of the media is generally respected and the media environment is broadly pluralistic with numerous public and private television and radio stations; however, this is undermined by extensive and non-transparent funding by political parties. Broadcasters are required by law to ensure fair, balanced, and impartial campaign coverage, providing equal and free airtime to all presidential candidates, and the ODIHR LEOM media monitoring showed that the public broadcaster generally complied with legal provisions; the coverage of private broadcasters reflected their political affiliations. However, a lack of detailed information on candidates' platforms, limited coverage in news programmes, and no clear distinction between different coverage formats, including paid and free, impacted voters' ability to make an informed choice. At odds with previous ODIHR recommendations, the National Audiovisual Council (CNA) did not conduct quantitative media monitoring, and insufficiently dissuasive sanctions limited its capacity to enforce legal requirements.

Roma continue to be underrepresented in public and political life, and face limited access to some public services, which underscores the need for broader state efforts to address systemic barriers. The law does not provide for election materials or voter education in minority languages, at odds with international good practice, and no such materials were made available for this election. No candidate from a national minority community contested the presidential election; one party actively campaigned in Hungarian for a presidential candidate.

Depending on the subject matter, complaints and appeals are adjudicated by electoral bureaus or judicial authorities. Before election day, the CEB adjudicated 39 complaints and appeals, mainly concerning the composition of EBs and campaign violations, upholding 10 of them, as well as 1,479 complaints related to online campaigning. Thirty-eight of these CEB decisions were contested at the Bucharest Court of Appeal, which upheld all of them. Lower-level bureaus published 292 decisions adjudicating complaints and appeals, mainly related to appointment of EBs, campaign violations, and breaches of personal data protection regulations. Overall, electoral disputes were handled efficiently and within the prescribed deadlines, with adjudicating bodies enjoying a high level of public trust, although some concerns were raised about the adjudication of online campaign-related complaints by the CEB. However, transparency in the resolution of electoral disputes was limited, as most complaints were adjudicated by election bureaus in closed sessions, contrary to a previous ODIHR recommendation and international good practice.

The legal framework permits citizen and international observers to monitor election-day procedures but does not explicitly provide for access to other stages of the electoral process, at odds with international good practice. Political parties and coalitions lacking a representative at a polling station may delegate a proxy, but independent candidates do not have this right. Despite operational and financial constraints,

the citizen observer community was active, contributing to transparency. In an inclusive process, the PEA accredited 53 citizen and 30 international observer groups to observe the elections.

The IEOM observed opening, voting, closing, and counting in a limited number of polling stations across the country but it did not undertake systematic or comprehensive observation of election day proceedings. Election day was generally calm, orderly, and professionally administered. Some observed shortcomings included instances where the secrecy of the vote was not fully ensured due to the placement of voting booths and the quality of the ballot paper, the presence of campaign materials near some polling stations, and the frequent presence of police officers inside polling stations, without invitation from the chairpersons. Vote counting and tabulation were generally well organized, and preliminary results were published in a timely manner and transparently online. The CEB considered over 220 complaints related to online content, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported some 310 generally minor misdemeanours. Available information on complaints filed with mid- and lower-level electoral bureaus was limited. On election day, ANCOM informed the public about continued efforts to address disinformation campaigns on social networks.

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## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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### Background and Political Context

The first round of the repeat presidential election was held on 4 May, following the annulment of the 24 November 2024 vote. The repeat election took place amid an intensified public debate on electoral integrity, questions concerning the independence of some state institutions involved in elections, and a growing focus on national identity.

In the annulled November election, independent candidate Călin Georgescu and Elena Lasconi of the Save Romania Union (USR) received 23 and 19 per cent of the vote, respectively, thus advancing to the second round.<sup>1</sup> On 2 December, the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) validated the election results, citing no evidence of major irregularities.<sup>2</sup> However, on 4 December, declassified intelligence reports outlined coordinated manipulation on social media platforms, as well as financial violations related to Mr. Georgescu's campaign. Acting *ex officio* on the basis of these reports, the CCR annulled the election on 6 December and ordered a re-run, while preparations for the second round were already underway and out-of-country voting had begun.<sup>3</sup>

The annulment prompted a range of reactions, including criticism from across the political spectrum over the lack of sufficient information on the nature and impact of the irregularities and the legal basis for the decision. It also intensified public debate over safeguards for democratic processes.<sup>4</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

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<sup>1</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 in Romania (RMDSZ/UDMR), supported by national minority parties.

<sup>2</sup> This followed a recount of all votes cast in the presidential race, in response to a formal complaint.

<sup>3</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. Subsequently, TikTok [reported](#) that it 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>4</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. In addition, there were more than 200 requests filed with the courts, requesting the annulment of the CCR decision of 6 December, all of which were dismissed, with the exception of a ruling of the Ploiești Court of Appeal on 24 April, which suspended the CCR decision on the annulment of the election. This decision was overturned by the High Court of Cassation and Justice on 25 April.

legal regulation and remedies.<sup>5</sup> On 8 January, the government scheduled the repeat election for 4 May.<sup>6</sup> On 26 February, the Prosecutor's Office opened a criminal investigation into Mr. Georgescu's campaign for suspected campaign finance violations, incitement to actions against the constitutional order, dissemination of false information, and association with an organization promoting fascist, racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic views.<sup>7</sup>

The Constitution provides for equal opportunities for men and women to hold public and elected office. However, enforcement of these provisions is limited.<sup>8</sup> 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) and 7 per cent of mayors are women. This underrepresentation in elected and appointed positions indicates that the authorities and political parties have not made sufficient efforts to increase women's participation in politics.

### **Legal Framework and Electoral System**

Overall, the legal framework for the presidential election provides an adequate basis for conducting democratic elections. However, it is overly complex, contains gaps and inconsistencies, and lacks clarity in several areas, which at times led to divergent interpretations.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to national legislation and European Union (EU) regulations applicable to the electoral process, in recent years, the government has frequently relied on Government Emergency Ordinances (GEOs) – a constitutional mechanism intended for exceptional circumstances – to amend legislation, including in electoral matters. Such use of GEOs undermines legal certainty and the quality of legislation, contrary to OSCE commitments.<sup>10</sup> On 16 January, the government issued GEO No. 1/2025 introducing changes to political advertising regulations, the composition of election bureaus, and voting hours abroad for this election. The ordinance was adopted without public consultation, and only four months prior to the election, contrary to international good practice.<sup>11</sup> Although the GEO was adopted with the declared aim of addressing shortcomings identified in the 2024 presidential electoral process, and it introduced specific deadlines and avenues for adjudicating complaints and appeals related to online campaign violations, the ordinance has not effectively regulated other key concerns, such as the oversight of online political advertising and campaign finance.

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<sup>5</sup> The Venice Commission's [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, based on concrete evidence, and ensure procedural guarantees, including the right to a hearing, to present evidence, and to appeal.

<sup>6</sup> On 10 February, President Iohannis, whose term was extended by the CCR, resigned, and Senate President Ilie Bolojan assumed the role of acting president, as prescribed by the Constitution.

<sup>7</sup> Proceedings imposed a 60-day judicial control measure on Mr. Georgescu, restricting his travel and social media activity, which was extended by another 60 days on 24 April.

<sup>8</sup> For example, three draft laws proposing mandatory gender quotas on parliamentary and local candidate lists and financial incentives for political parties have been shelved since 2022.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, the legal framework lacks provisions to address emerging challenges such as the use of digital technology in the electoral process and campaigns; it does not sufficiently regulate signature verification procedures; it contains unclear rules on whether presidential candidates may benefit from paid airtime; it does not clearly distinguish between campaign violations and obstruction of campaigning. The legislation does not contain rules on campaigning prior to the official start of the campaign period and third-party campaigning; and it permits divergent interpretations of the competence to adjudicate complaints against electoral bureaus.

<sup>10</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 is currently pending approval by the Chamber of Deputies. Paragraph 5.8 of the 1990 OSCE [Copenhagen Document](#) states that legislation should be adopted at the end of a public procedure. See also paragraph 46 of the 2025 Venice Commission [Opinion](#) on the emergency ordinance regarding the merger of the 2024 elections for the European Parliament and local authorities.

<sup>11</sup> Section II.2.b of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission 2002 [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) (Code of Good Practice) states that "fundamental elements of electoral law, in particular the electoral system proper, membership of electoral commissions and the drawing of constituency boundaries, should not be open to amendment less than one year before an election".

The legal framework is further complemented by rulings of the Constitutional Court of Romania (see *Candidate Rights and Registration*). The practice of amending the legal framework and the Constitution through CCR rulings and GEOs, without subsequently consolidating the changes through formal legislative revision by parliament, challenges the principles of legal stability and separation of powers, at odds with OSCE commitments.<sup>12</sup>

The election-related legislation 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 related to consolidating the electoral legislation, ensuring transparency and equitable political representation in election administration, and establishing clear procedures for verifying support signatures.

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>13</sup>

### **Election Administration**

The election administration efficiently managed election preparations and met legal deadlines but its work lacked transparency. The election was administered by the Permanent Electoral Authority (PEA) and a temporary structure of electoral bureaus, led by the Central Electoral Bureau (CEB).<sup>14</sup> The CEB consists of up to 18 members: 5 High Court judges, the PEA president and vice-presidents, and ten party representatives.<sup>15</sup> The mid-level election administration comprises 48 County Election Bureaus (CoEBs), each with up to 11 members: 3 local court judges, 1 PEA representative, and up to 7 party nominees.<sup>16</sup> Election-day procedures were administered by 19,944 Electoral Bureaus for Polling Stations (EBs), including 965 established abroad in 95 countries. Each EB was composed of up to nine members: a chairperson and a deputy, selected from the PEA roster of experts, and seven party nominees. Six of the 18 CEB members (33 per cent) were women, and women comprised 35 per cent of the CoEB members and 70 per cent of EB chairs and deputies.

Under GEO No. 1/2025, parliamentary parties were given precedence in assigning members to electoral bureaus, regardless of whether they had nominated presidential candidates. Independent candidates had no representation in the election administration, and were not entitled to appoint proxies, while non-parliamentary parties nominating candidates had limited representation, affecting scrutiny of the

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<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 18.1 of the 1991 OSCE [Moscow Document](#) states that “[l]egislation will be formulated and adopted as the result of an open process reflecting the will of the people, either directly or through their elected representatives”.

<sup>13</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>14</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. On 28 February, the parliament dismissed the PEA president, 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 president assumed the interim presidency.

<sup>15</sup> The CEB president and its deputy are elected by the appointed judges from among themselves, by secret ballot.

<sup>16</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 electoral process at county level.

election administration, at odds with international good practice.<sup>17</sup> Despite previous ODIHR recommendations, sessions of all election bureaus were closed to the public, limiting transparency.<sup>18</sup> Further, information published by election bureaus was at times limited or inconsistent.<sup>19</sup>

The PEA, together with the Special Telecommunication Service (STS), conducted cascade training for electoral bureaus and IT operators. The IT training sessions observed by ODIHR LEOM long-term observers (LTOs) were generally comprehensive, but some lacked sufficient interaction and adequate equipment.<sup>20</sup> Some general training sessions for EB management were assessed as well organized, while others lacked practical exercises and participant engagement. Party-nominated members were not included in the training, which, combined with the high number of last-minute replacements of EB members, resulted in a significant proportion of polling staff remaining untrained, contrary to international good practice.<sup>21</sup> Voter education efforts by the PEA and other state institutions were limited to online video spots providing general information, including on voting abroad, and did not sufficiently address the needs of special groups, such as first-time voters, persons with disabilities, and national minorities, including Roma.<sup>22</sup>

Polling stations are required by law and PEA regulations to be accessible to voters with physical disabilities; however, in practice, accessibility of electoral premises and election materials remained limited, contrary to international standards. Voters with physical disabilities may also vote at designated barrier-free polling stations or by using a mobile ballot box.<sup>23</sup> The PEA implemented a limited pilot project to introduce information materials in various formats for voters with disabilities at a number of polling stations and published polling station accessibility data.<sup>24</sup>

## **Voter Rights and Registration**

Citizens who are at least 18 years old on election day are eligible to vote, unless this right has been revoked by a court decision due to a conviction for certain criminal offences or on the grounds of legal incapacity. The denial of voting rights on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability is contrary to international standards.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> At CoEB level, parties that nominated Mr. Antonescu comprised 43 per cent of party-appointed membership, followed by those supporting Mr. Simion (28 per cent), and Ms. Lasconi (14 per cent). Paragraph II.3.1.e of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that “political parties must be equally represented on electoral commissions or must be able to observe the work of the impartial body”.

<sup>18</sup> Section II.3.1.81 of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that “meetings of the central electoral commission should be open to everyone, including the media”. Citizen observers who requested to observe CEB sessions were rejected. The ODIHR LEOM requested access to CEB sessions and was invited to attend part of one session on 17 April; some ODIHR LEOM LTO teams have also been invited to a number of CoEB sessions.

<sup>19</sup> Complaints filed with the CoEBs and session minutes were generally not published.

<sup>20</sup> All IT operators received the necessary equipment prior to the simulation exercise on 25 and 26 April.

<sup>21</sup> Some parties, including PSD, SOS Romania Party (S.O.S.), RMDSZ/UDMR and USR informed the ODIHR LEOM that they had conducted their own training for EB members. EB members could be replaced until the day before election day. According to the PEA, replacements until 30 April impacted 5,956 EB management members and some 6,500 IT operators. Paragraph II.3.1.g of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that: “members of electoral commissions must receive standard training”.

<sup>22</sup> Several TV channels aired video spots produced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs about voter identification, warnings against disinformation, vote buying and campaigning on election day.

<sup>23</sup> See article 29(a)i of the 2006 UN [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD), which states that “States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others [... e]nsuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use”.

<sup>24</sup> According to data from the PEA, 17,136 PSs are located on the ground floor, 15,281 PS are equipped with ramps, and 383 do not comply with accessibility criteria.

<sup>25</sup> According to the PEA, for these elections, 20,314 citizens have been disenfranchised due to legal incapacity or criminal convictions. Articles 12 and 29 of the [CRPD](#) state that “parties shall recognize that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others” and guarantee “political rights [...] on an equal basis with others”.

Voter registration is passive and continuous. The voter register, which is maintained by the PEA, was automatically updated until 30 April, based on data from the civil registry and other state institutions. Voters were given sufficient opportunity to verify their registration details online or in person at mayoral and PEA offices. Presidential contestants had the right to request extracts from the voter register for verification purposes; according to the PEA, no candidate made such a request.<sup>26</sup> The final voter lists included 17,988,031 voters residing in the country and an additional 1,016,350 abroad. Women constituted 51.77 per cent of voters residing in Romania.

In-country voters were assigned to polling stations based on their place of residence. However, any voter could cast their ballot at any polling station outside their territorial unit, including abroad, without submitting a prior request.<sup>27</sup> Out-of-country voting was conducted in embassies, consulates, and other designated premises on election day and the two preceding days, and was available to voters permanently residing abroad as well as those who registered in advance. Additionally, some 6,200 voters abroad registered for postal voting, and approximately 4,000 ultimately cast their ballot by post. Some 86,034 voters with reduced mobility voted at home. To prevent multiple voting and facilitate the transmission of preliminary results, the PEA and STS operated the Information System for Monitoring Turnout and Preventing Illegal Voting (SIMPV) to verify voter eligibility, register voters who have cast their ballot, enable video-recording of the vote count, and check the arithmetic accuracy of result protocols.

Most electoral stakeholders had confidence in the accuracy of the voter register and the safeguards ensuring the integrity of voter registration and identification. However, socially disadvantaged groups, particularly Roma, have reportedly faced administrative obstacles in obtaining or renewing permanent identity documents linked to a registered address and needed to obtain temporary documents to vote, a process that was at times burdensome in practice.<sup>28</sup>

### Candidate Rights and Registration

Citizens over 35 years of age who have the right to vote and permanently reside in Romania are eligible to run for president. Candidates may be nominated by political parties or coalitions, or stand independently. Nomination documents must include at least 200,000 support signatures from voters. Voters may sign in support of multiple nominees. The high number of required signatures exceeds the one per cent limit recommended by international good practice and was noted by some nominees as an impediment to candidacy.<sup>29</sup>

Contrary to a previous ODIHR recommendation and at odds with international good practice, the legislation lacks detailed provisions to regulate the collection and verification of support signatures, and does not ensure consistent application by the CEB or prevent potential misuse by candidates.<sup>30</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 limited its review to assessing compliance with formal requirements.

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<sup>26</sup> Several contestants requested access to the voter register at county level; the PEA informed the ODIHR LEOM that it does not maintain aggregated data of such requests.

<sup>27</sup> Supplementary voter lists are compiled for all voters abroad and those voting outside their polling stations.

<sup>28</sup> According to a [statement](#) by the Chairperson of the Parliament's Human Rights Committee, an estimated 200,000 Roma households are home to individuals who are not officially assigned a residence address and lack personal documentation.

<sup>29</sup> Section I.1.3.ii of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that “[t]he law should not require collection of the signatures of more than 1 per cent of voters in the constituency concerned”.

<sup>30</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. Numerous ODIHR LEOM interlocutors expressed doubts about the ability of certain contestants to genuinely collect the required number of signatures within the limited timeframe. Section I.1.3.iii of the [Code of Good Practice](#) state that “checking of signatures must be governed by clear rules”.

The verification 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 candidate. In two cases, the CEB referred cases involving indications of forged signatures to the Prosecutor's Office, which confirmed that investigations were initiated, but did not provide any public update before election day.

The CEB registered 12 out of 25 prospective candidates and rejected 13 applications on the grounds that nominees failed to meet the eligibility criteria or submitted incomplete documentation. Of these, 11 were rejected on technical grounds, while 2 were rejected by the CEB on the basis of CCR rulings. Diana Șoșoacă's candidacy was denied pursuant to CCR Decision No. 2 of 5 October 2024, related to the previous presidential election, which stated that candidates must, at the time of nomination, fulfil the requirements of the presidential oath, including respect for the Constitution and defence of democracy, and anticipated, based on her previous behaviour, that she would not comply with these obligations. Călin Georgescu's candidacy was rejected with reference to CCR Decision No. 32/2024, which annulled the 2024 presidential election on the grounds that he had breached the obligation to defend democracy; the CEB concluded that it could not establish that he now met the required conditions. The CCR received 61 appeals concerning the registration of 11 candidates and the rejection of 8 nominees. It upheld the respective CEB decisions in all cases.<sup>31</sup>

Overall, the application of eligibility criteria derived from CCR jurisprudence, rather than established in explicit legal provisions, compromised the transparency and predictability of the process, and did not safeguard against arbitrary application, which affected the inclusiveness of candidate registration. On 20 March, one candidate withdrew, leaving 11 contestants on the ballot, including 2 women and 4 independent candidates.<sup>32</sup>

## **Election Campaign**

The law guarantees equal opportunities for all candidates to access media and public spaces but it restricts campaigning methods by limiting the types of permitted materials, which was perceived by some contestants as an undue constraint.<sup>33</sup> For this election, GEO No. 1/2025 broadened the definition of political advertising to include indirect promotion of contestants, expanded labelling requirements for written, audio, and video materials, including those published online, and applied the definition of 'political actor' from EU Regulation 2024/900. Overall, labelling requirements were unclear, and many candidate and party representatives found them to be burdensome in the media and on social networks and ineffective in addressing unlawful campaigning. Despite a previous ODIHR recommendation, the

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<sup>31</sup> Four additional appeals were deemed inadmissible by the CCR due to procedural omissions.

<sup>32</sup> Candidates on the ballot were George Crin Laurențiu Antonescu (Romania Forward Electoral Alliance, A.RO), John-Ion Banu-Muscel (independent), Nicușor-Daniel Dan (independent), Petru-Daniel Funeriu (independent), Elena-Valerica Lasconi (USR), Sebastian-Constantin Popescu (PNR), Silviu Predoiu (PLAN), Victor-Viorel Ponta (independent), Marcela-Lavinia Șandru (Social Liberal Humanist Party, PUSL), George-Nicolae Simion (AUR), and Cristian-Vasile Terheș (PNCR).

<sup>33</sup> Permitted campaign materials are small posters in designated areas, audio and video content in the media and online, print advertisements, and printed materials such as brochures and flyers. CEB Decision No. 54D of 26 March explicitly listed 17 prohibited categories of materials, including vehicles, tents, banners, flags, and billboards. On 30 April, the CEB ordered the immediate cessation of the distribution of campaign letters by presidential candidate George Simion and the AUR party. The letters, over a million, included voters' personal data without their consent. This decision followed the successful appeal of the USR Brașov branch against the earlier rejection of its complaint by the Brașov CoEB. Prior to the start of the official campaign on 4 April, some contestants engaged in intensive pre-campaigning during a period not covered by campaign regulations.

law contains insufficient safeguards against the misuse of administrative resources; a few instances of potential misuse were reported during the campaign period.<sup>34</sup>

Fundamental freedoms of association and assembly were respected during the campaign. Voters had a genuine choice between political alternatives. Candidates primarily campaigned online, with limited outreach via posters, leaflets, mailing, or public rallies.<sup>35</sup> Most contestants positioned themselves as ‘anti-system’, criticizing the political establishment, including over the annulment of the 2024 presidential election, at times questioning the legitimacy of the repeat election, and claiming to represent Romanian “national identity”, “traditional values”, and Christian faith. The campaign was marked by recriminations and personal attacks between candidates, with few concrete policy proposals until the final week.<sup>36</sup> References to gender equality were limited, with several candidates addressing women primarily in their “traditional” roles.<sup>37</sup> On 9 April, USR withdrew its support from Ms. Lasconi to support Mr. Dan, prompting public debate and court cases on whether political parties are legally permitted to campaign for candidates they had not nominated.<sup>38</sup>

All contestants used social networking platforms and the leading candidates also advertised online.<sup>39</sup> Several political party representatives, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and media outlets noted the widespread presence of inauthentic behaviour online in the campaign. These included attempts to influence the visibility of posts and the use of bots or troll farms and artificial intelligence (AI)-generated material to amplify or suppress candidates’ content.<sup>40</sup> In mid-April, two candidates stated that their social media accounts had been targeted by coordinated inauthentic behaviour.<sup>41</sup> The Ministry of Defence, several CSOs and media outlets also noted the presence of what they considered disinformation narratives in the online sphere, in part originating from abroad and at times linked to

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<sup>34</sup> The use of technical, financial, or human resources of public institutions to support candidates is prohibited, and public officials may campaign only in a personal capacity, without using official resources or performing official duties. On 24 April, the PEA notified the Prosecutor’s Office regarding a potential case of misuse of administrative resources by one candidate. In addition, media reported that a high-level public official openly declared support for a candidate while referring to his official capacity during a campaign event; and the same official was shown endorsing the same candidate in online and television ads.

<sup>35</sup> ODIHR LEOM LTOs observed eight public campaign events held by two candidates across six counties. Only three featured women as speakers, and, on average, women comprised one third of the participants. All but one venue was accessible for persons with disabilities. During the campaign period, LTOs reported isolated instances of inflammatory rhetoric, poster destruction, placement of posters outside designated spaces, and non-compliance with poster format requirements. Vandalism of campaign posters was frequently observed.

<sup>36</sup> During the last phase of the campaign, the main policy areas discussed included economic reform, pensions and support for businesses, justice and judicial reform, national security and hybrid threats, education and healthcare reforms, diaspora engagement and Romania’s geopolitical alignment.

<sup>37</sup> Ms. Lasconi highlighted women’s leadership qualities in her campaign, while Mr. Simion and Mr. Antonescu primarily addressed women as “mothers, wives and homemakers”.

<sup>38</sup> On 12 April, the CEB ruled that USR was not permitted to campaign for any candidate other than Ms. Lasconi. Although the Bucharest Court of Appeal acknowledged Ms. Lasconi as the legitimate party candidate on 17 April, the USR National Bureau reaffirmed withholding funding the following day. On 23 April, the CEB announced that political parties may not provide financial or material support to candidates they had not nominated. On 30 April, the High Court of Cassation and Justice upheld the lower court’s decision recognising Ms. Lasconi as the official USR candidate.

<sup>39</sup> The ODIHR LEOM monitored over 60 social media accounts, including those of all presidential candidates and the parties supporting them. The main platforms used were TikTok and Facebook, with Instagram and X used less frequently. By the end of the campaign, the number of posts from official accounts was highest for Victor Ponta (558), followed by Crin Antonescu (323), Elena Lasconi (287), Nicușor Dan (274), Silviu Predoiu (215), Sebastian Constantin-Popescu (211), Cristian Terheș (171), Lavinia Șandru (155), George Simion (129), Daniel Funeriu (80), John-Ion Banu Muscel (56).

<sup>40</sup> See the Funky Citizens [report](#) of 26 April stating that some patterns of online behaviour are inconsistent with statistical norms.

<sup>41</sup> Both candidates alleged that the inauthentic activity primarily originated from Asia and was intended to trigger moderation measures for manipulative behaviour. One candidate reported the activity to the authorities, who did not classify it as a cyberattack.

electoral campaign messages.<sup>42</sup> State authorities launched awareness-raising initiatives, including a debunking site run by the Ministry of Defence.<sup>43</sup>

The regulatory framework for online campaigning is based on the EU Digital Services Act (DSA), which requires Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) to proactively assess and mitigate risks their operations pose to civic discourse, electoral processes, and public security.<sup>44</sup> In the context of the presidential election, VLOPs took some steps to counter inauthentic behaviour on social networking platforms.<sup>45</sup> However, these measures were insufficient to effectively address concerns related to inauthentic behaviour. Moreover, public oversight of VLOPs' conduct remained very limited due to the absence of real-time transparency obligations.<sup>46</sup> Some CSOs also monitored and reported inauthentic behaviour or manipulative content to VLOPs during the campaign.<sup>47</sup>

According to state authorities, preparations to address online threats increased after the annulment of the November 2024 presidential election.<sup>48</sup> A meeting designed to enhance institutional cooperation, referred to by authorities as a "stress test" was conducted on 27 March with the participation of the EC, the election administration, the CNA, and VLOPs; limited information about its outcome was made available, missing an opportunity to inform the public about state efforts to tackle online threats.

During the campaign, several state institutions flagged suspected inauthentic content and accounts to VLOPs, and a platform to prevent duplication in reporting these activities to the platforms was established in December. The National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications (ANCOM) acted as designated coordinator with the European Commission for flagging systemic risks.<sup>49</sup> The Ministry of Internal Affairs informed the ODIHR LEOM that it flagged more than 450 accounts to VLOPs for various reasons, including suspected foreign information manipulation. The CEB adjudicated complaints related to online campaigning and transmitted content moderation instructions to VLOPs through the PEA. However, it was not mandated to proactively monitor online

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<sup>42</sup> See a [press statement](#) of 28 March of the Ministry of Defence; as well as Funky Citizen [weekly reports](#) on disinformation narratives.

<sup>43</sup> The Ministry of Defence's "[debunking site](#)", shortly before the start of the campaign, denied false reports of troop mobilization. See also the [announcement](#) of 7 April by the Intelligence Service (SRI) that it was combating disinformation and other online threats.

<sup>44</sup> The DSA is implemented through Law 50/2024, adopted in March 2024. 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 Meta (operating Facebook and Instagram) and TikTok, with smaller numbers of people using X.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, TikTok increased Romanian-language moderation from 94 to 99 people.

<sup>46</sup> VLOPs are only required to publish annual reports on their DSA-related activities. Transparency reports 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. TikTok [released](#) data on 28 April, which showed that it continued to remove some coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

<sup>47</sup> Civil society organizations monitoring online activities included [ActiveWatch](#), [Context](#), [Expert Forum](#), and [Funky Citizens](#), as well as [media](#) organizations. By election day, CSOs had flagged to the VLOPs more than 2,400 posts as suspicious. In addition, the fact-checking site [Factual](#) ran a series of fact-checks, many of which related to disinformation appearing to be anti-EU and anti-Ukraine.

<sup>48</sup> Before the official campaign period, the National Audiovisual Council (CNA) acted on notifications concerning alleged violations in online audiovisual content, including posts by individuals on social networks. Some removal orders were criticized by media freedom groups as potentially infringing on freedom of expression, with concerns raised that CNA may have exceeded its mandate.

<sup>49</sup> In the campaign period, ANCOM flagged more than 240 accounts to the VLOPs as potentially breaching their terms and conditions for inauthentic behaviour. On 2 May, the [Ministry of Internal Affairs](#), and [ANCOM](#) informed the public that the authorities had identified AI generated accounts aimed at data harvesting and directing audiences to "doppelgänger" accounts, which replicate authorities' and media's websites but with disinformation narratives. ANCOM claimed that "[t]hese influencing actions do not aim to promote specific entities, but to amplify social, economic and political dissatisfaction... with the aim of polarizing society and decreasing the population's trust in public authorities".

platforms.<sup>50</sup> While most officials noted enhanced institutional cooperation since previous elections, oversight of the online environment remained split across multiple institutions, which resulted in a fragmented response to identified issues and limited transparency. Authorities reported improved – but still not fully adequate – cooperation with VLOPs, noting that although posts were removed, this was not always done promptly and reposted or re-edited problematic content often remained accessible.<sup>51</sup>

By election day, the CEB had published 1,479 decisions on complaints related to online campaigning, mostly submitted by individuals, leading to 744 removal decisions related to 5,188 posts.<sup>52</sup> Three political parties lodged complaints: PNL submitted one, which was dismissed; USR submitted five, resulting in the removal of seven posts, while AUR filed 158 complaints, leading to the removal of 154 posts. The majority of these concerned campaign materials published by individuals declared political actors without the required labelling or by accounts considered inauthentic. CEB decisions were not published in an easily accessible and consistent format, impacting transparency; moreover, in some decisions, the CEB applied the definition of ‘political actor’ inconsistently.<sup>53</sup> The CEB also ordered the removal of more than 750 posts by individuals, some of which did not hold elected office or other public functions, which may have had a chilling effect on authentic civic activism and was criticized by several ODIHR LEOM interlocutors as restricting freedom of expression. Meta contested six separate CEB decisions concerning the interpretation of the term ‘political actor’ at the Bucharest Court of Appeal (BCoA), which rejected all the complaints.

## **Campaign Finance**

Campaign finance is regulated by the Political Finance Law, supplemented by PEA regulations. The legal framework has remained unchanged since the last presidential election, leaving most ODIHR and the Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) recommendations unaddressed, including those related to enhancing the PEA’s oversight capacity, improving financial reporting, and applying more dissuasive sanctions for violations.

Presidential campaigns can be financed by political parties, as well as by candidates’ own resources, loans, and individual donations. Third-party financing is prohibited.<sup>54</sup> Annual public funding allocated to political parties ranges from 0.01 per cent to 0.04 per cent of the gross domestic product, an amount

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<sup>50</sup> On 26 March, the CEB established an inter-institutional “Working Group for Online Campaign” to process complaints submitted by citizens, political party representatives, and NGOs regarding online campaigning, and to support the CEB in taking decisions on possible violations, including instructing VLOPs through the PEA to remove unlawful content. Complaints could be submitted online, and during certain periods ahead of election day, the Working Group operated on a 24-hour basis.

<sup>51</sup> The CEB informed the ODIHR LEOM that it also flagged more than 200 accounts assessed as potentially inauthentic to VLOPs through the PEA and only between one quarter and one third of these accounts were subsequently removed by the VLOPs.

<sup>52</sup> While the complainants were anonymized for data protection reasons by the CEB, many of them appeared to have the same initials. Some ODIHR LEOM interlocutors noted that the high volume of complaints from a limited number of individuals may have targeted specific candidates and slowed down CEB activities.

<sup>53</sup> On 15 April, the CEB issued a press release stating that individuals who do not hold elected or other public positions may be declared political actors if they ‘predominantly and repetitively’ post electoral propaganda on their personal accounts, constituting a broader interpretation of the term ‘political actor’ than those established in EU and national law. The CEB determined that a post by the prime minister calling for a candidate’s withdrawal and criticizing another did not constitute electoral messaging, while a private citizen unaffiliated with any political party was declared a ‘political actor’ and their post expressing voting intentions, was deemed unlawful for not having the proper labelling.

<sup>54</sup> Expert Forum notified the PEA in three complaints that several social network accounts that are not official accounts of parties or candidates had placed political advertisements totalling nearly RON 250,000 (EUR 50,000) between 6 and 24 April; the CEB partially accepted two complaints and accepted the third one, in all cases requesting the removal of specific accounts.

considered unduly high by most ODIHR LEOM interlocutors.<sup>55</sup> Presidential candidates are eligible for reimbursement of campaign expenses up to RON 81 million (around EUR 16.2 million), provided they obtain at least 3 per cent of the valid votes cast.<sup>56</sup> Not in line with international standards, the expenditure ceiling is unreasonably high, raising questions about its effectiveness in preventing excessive campaign spending.<sup>57</sup>

Campaign finance regulations, including online, only apply to the 30-day campaign period. Most contestants incurred campaign-related expenses before this timeframe, which are not subject to reporting requirements and reimbursement.<sup>58</sup> Contestants must open a designated bank account for all campaign-related funds and report contributions and expenditures to the PEA within three days of each transaction, although at this time, they do not need to submit supporting documentation. At odds with international good practice, the legal framework does not mandate public disclosure of financial information; however, the PEA has published it on a weekly basis, contributing to transparency.<sup>59</sup> In some cases, the ODIHR LEOM observed discrepancies between the expenses declared by electoral contestants and those reported by VLOPs.<sup>60</sup>

Final financial reports must be submitted within 30 days of election day.<sup>61</sup> The PEA also oversees compliance with campaign finance regulations on an ongoing basis *ex officio* and in response to complaints. There is no mechanism for the electronic submission of financial reports, and the human and digital resources available to the PEA are limited. Moreover, the PEA is not mandated to conduct audits beyond the documentation provided, which is at odds with international good practice.<sup>62</sup> The PEA may impose fines ranging from RON 10,000 to 50,000 (EUR 2,000 to 10,000) for non-compliance; these sanctions were widely seen as lacking a deterrent effect.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Based on [data](#) from the PEA, in 2024, political parties received a total of RON 382.4 million (EUR 76.4 million) in public funding, allocated in proportion to the votes obtained in the most recent parliamentary and local elections. 1 Romanian Leu (RON) = EUR 0.20.

<sup>56</sup> A total of RON 133.1 million (around EUR 26.6 million) in campaign spending had been declared to the PEA up to 2 May. Crin Antonescu (48.3 per cent), Victor Ponta (24.5 per cent), and Nicușor Dan (13.2 per cent) accounted for the largest shares of the total declared expenditures.

<sup>57</sup> In the 2025 presidential election, the expenditure ceiling is RON 81 million. In the 2019 presidential election, no candidate spent more than half of the applicable ceiling; in 2024, only one candidate reached 85 per cent of the threshold, with all others spending less than half of the ceiling. See 1996 UN Human Rights Committee [General Comment No. 25](#) to Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which provides for reasonable limitations on campaign expenditures “where this is necessary to ensure that the free choice of voters is not undermined or the democratic process distorted by disproportionate expenditure on behalf of any candidate or party”.

<sup>58</sup> Paragraph 262 of the 2020 ODIHR [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “[l]egislation should provide clear rules and guidelines regarding which activities are not allowed during the pre-election campaign, and what income and expenditures for such activities during this time should be regarded as campaign resources subject to proper review and sanction”.

<sup>59</sup> According to Paragraph 261 of the 2020 ODIHR [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#), “[i]t is good practice to require [...] reports providing oversight bodies and the public with preliminary information on campaign incomes and expenses of parties and candidates several days before election day”.

<sup>60</sup> According to data from Meta Ad Library retrieved on election day, in April, contestants spent approximately RON 9.4 million (around EUR 1.8 million) in advertising costs, while only one contestant itemised Meta-related expenses of RON 656,000 (around EUR 131,200) within the total online spending of RON 62.8 million (around EUR 12.5 million) declared to PEA by May 2.

<sup>61</sup> The PEA must issue its conclusions within the following 60 days. By election day, the PEA had not published the control reports on the financing of the most recent presidential election contestants, despite the legal deadline of 8 March having passed.

<sup>62</sup> Paragraph 278 of the 2020 ODIHR [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that “[t]he supervisory authority should be given the power to monitor accounts and conduct audits of financial reports submitted by parties and candidates”.

<sup>63</sup> In the [2017 Addendum to the Second Compliance Report of the Third Evaluation Report on Romania](#), GRECO stated that “[w]hile the new Methodological Norms have added another layer of fines, GRECO still considers that the level of sanctions provided for by Law No. 334/2006 remain disproportionately low”.

Shortly before election day, the PEA Control Department conducted financial compliance checks on three contestants concerning possible violations of the Political Finance Law.<sup>64</sup> The PEA also requested that VLOPs provide information on the identity of those who financed online advertisements that the CEB had requested to be removed. Overall, despite limitations in resources, the PEA's active approach in overseeing certain campaign finance-related issues shortly before election day was a positive step to enhance transparency.

## Media

The media landscape is diverse with numerous public and private television and radio stations, and online news portals.<sup>65</sup> While the environment is generally conducive to media freedom, pluralism is distorted by extensive and non-transparent funding by political parties, which contributes to self-censorship and facilitates clientelism between political actors and the media, at odds with international good practice.<sup>66</sup> In recent years, instances of pressure and attacks on journalists, including smear campaigns and surveillance, have been reported.<sup>67</sup> Most ODIHR LEOM media interlocutors also noted an increase in the number of strategic lawsuits against journalists and difficulties in accessing public information.<sup>68</sup>

Under the Audiovisual Law, broadcasters are required to ensure fair, balanced, and impartial campaign coverage, and provide equal and free airtime for all presidential candidates.<sup>69</sup> Campaign coverage is permitted in electoral promotion, electoral debate, or informative programmes, each subject to distinct labelling requirements; however, the legal definition of these categories is unclear.<sup>70</sup> Due to ambiguous provisions, broadcasters applied varying interpretations of the rules on free and paid airtime and related labelling.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> One compliance check was initiated *ex officio*, concerning AUR's campaign finances. A second one concerned Mr. Dan's finances and was referred to the Prosecutor's Office by the PEA. A separate compliance check into USR was launched following a request submitted by Ms. Lasconi.

<sup>65</sup> Television remains the main source of information, followed by social networking platforms and online news portals. As of 2024, internet penetration in Romania stood at 91.6 per cent. Recent research shows an overall decline of trust in news across all platforms.

<sup>66</sup> See the CoE [Recommendation \(2018\)1 on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership](#), which states that "[h]igh levels of transparency should also be ensured with regard to the sources of financing of media [...] States are [...] encouraged to promote the disclosure by media outlets of contractual relations with other media or advertising companies and political parties that may have an influence on editorial independence".

<sup>67</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.

<sup>68</sup> For instance, in 2023, a journalist from Recorder.ro filed a [lawsuit](#) against the Presidential Administration for denying access to information on public spending. Concerns over access to information and SLAPPs have been raised in the 2024 [EU Rule of Law Report](#).

<sup>69</sup> On 26 February, the CNA adopted [Decision No. 86/2025](#) to regulate the coverage of the presidential campaign, reiterating 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*) allocated two minutes of free electoral promotion daily to each candidate, amounting to a total of 30 minutes per candidate. Political parties and coalitions supporting candidates may purchase airtime on private broadcasters. The CNA [registered](#) 230 broadcasters intending to cover the election.

<sup>70</sup> By law, 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. In line with GEO No. 1/2025, both electoral promotion and advertising spots must be appropriately labelled. As the definition of electoral promotion programmes does not explicitly exclude the participation of journalists, in some instances, identical material was labelled either as electoral promotion or as an electoral debate. Furthermore, the regulations do not set out explicit requirements for distinguishing between free and paid airtime.

<sup>71</sup> Some broadcasters interpreted the provision as requiring that airtime for candidates be free of charge at all times, while others offered a certain amount of free airtime and published pricelists for the purchase of additional airtime.

Oversight of campaign coverage in broadcast media is vested in the National Audiovisual Council (CNA). The CNA held regular board meetings that were open to the public. In the absence of legal deadlines for handling complaints, the CNA considered campaign-related violations during its regular sessions, and its decisions did not always ensure timely redress. At odds with previous ODIHR recommendations, the CNA did not conduct quantitative media monitoring, relying instead on the verification of weekly reports submitted by broadcasters.<sup>72</sup> During the campaign, the CNA issued 13 sanctions.<sup>73</sup> The maximum imposable fine is not considered to constitute an effective deterrent against violations.<sup>74</sup> Overall, the lack of monitoring of national broadcasters, coupled with an insufficiently dissuasive sanctioning mechanism, limited the CNA's ability to effectively enforce legal requirements for campaign coverage.

The ODIHR LEOM media monitoring showed that broadcasters mainly covered the campaign in current affairs and talk show programmes, while coverage in news programmes was limited.<sup>75</sup> The public broadcaster *TVR* covered all contestants in a balanced manner, in line with legal provisions, and organized a series of debate programmes featuring candidates or their representatives.<sup>76</sup> *ProTV* did not cover the campaign beyond limited mention in the news. Political affiliation of most private broadcasters was reflected in their coverage. Moreover, during the last days of the campaign, candidates appeared on *Digi24*, *Realitatea Plus TV* and *Antena 3 CNN* in shows presented by prominent anchors that had the appearance of being an interview or conversation but were marked as electoral promotion.

*A3 CNN* dedicated most of its coverage to Mr. Antonescu (20 per cent), Mr. Dan (18 per cent), Ms. Lasconi (15 per cent), and Mr. Ponta (12 per cent), largely portraying Mr. Antonescu neutrally and positively, Mr. Dan neutrally and negatively, Ms. Lasconi neutrally, and Mr. Ponta negatively and neutrally.<sup>77</sup> *Digi24* gave significant coverage to Mr. Antonescu (19 per cent), Mr. Dan (15 per cent), Ms. Lasconi (15 per cent), Mr. Ponta (13 per cent) and Mr. Simion (9 per cent). While its coverage was largely neutral in general, Mr. Antonescu received some positive, and Mr. Ponta and Mr. Simion some negative coverage. *Realitatea Plus TV* dedicated most of its coverage to Mr. Simion (17 per cent) in a positive and neutral tone, Mr. Dan (17 per cent) and Mr. Ponta (15 per cent), largely portraying them negatively, and Mr. Antonescu (10 per cent) in a neutral tone; while also dedicating a significant amount of time to the activities of 2024 presidential candidate Călin Georgescu (13 per cent), mainly in a positive or neutral tone.<sup>78</sup> *România TV* devoted most coverage to Mr. Ponta (33 per cent) in a neutral or

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<sup>72</sup> On 24 and 29 April, the CNA published data on airtime used by candidates in electoral broadcasts for the period of 4 to 24 April.

<sup>73</sup> On 10 and 16 April, the CNA issued warnings to *România TV* for publishing a public opinion poll and to *Realitatea Plus TV* for violating the impartiality of candidate coverage. On 24 April, *România TV* was sanctioned with 10 minutes of broadcast suspension for cumulative violations, not only related to the campaign, and *Realitatea TV* with a 50,000 RON-fine for repeated violations for not informing objectively on Mr. Ponta and Mr. Dan. On 29 April, warnings were issued to *Realitatea Plus TV*, a fine of RON 20,000 to *Naşul TV*, and a fine of RON 10,000 to *Canal 33* for various campaign-related violations, such as derogatory statements against candidates. On 30 April, *România TV* was sanctioned with two warnings and a fine of RON 10,000 for broadcasting an electoral advertising spot during a news segment, difficult to see labelling and derogatory statements against candidates. On 2 May, *România TV* was sanctioned with a suspension of its broadcast for 10 minutes due to a lack of objective reporting, including on Mr. Antonescu. On election day, the CNA, acting *ex officio*, sanctioned *România TV*, with a suspension of its broadcast for three hours due to incorrect presentation of facts related to the campaign.

<sup>74</sup> The maximum imposable fine for election campaign related violations amounts to RON 100,000. Electoral advertising spots in national broadcasters cost between RON 12,500 and 27,400 per 30 seconds. At the same time, expenditures in traditional media for one candidate reported to PEA in the second week amounted to 25,600,000 RON.

<sup>75</sup> The ODIHR LEOM conducted a quantitative and qualitative media monitoring of the primetime (18:00-24:00) programmes of six national TV channels (*TVRI*, *PRO TV*, *Romania TV*, *Realitatea Plus TV*, *Antena 3 CNN* and *DIGI24*) from 4 April to 4 May 2025.

<sup>76</sup> On 29 April, *TVR* held a final debate featuring all candidates apart from Mr. Simion. *Digi24* and *A3 CNN* also organized final debates where not all candidates participated.

<sup>77</sup> *A3 CNN* dedicated only 7 per cent to Mr. Simion, largely in a neutral and negative tone.

<sup>78</sup> *Realitatea Plus TV* also provided coverage for Ms. Lasconi (5 per cent, mostly in a neutral tone).

positive tone, while portraying Mr. Antonescu, Mr. Dan and Mr. Simion, mainly negatively (24, 10 and 9 per cent, respectively).<sup>79</sup>

Overall, discourse on monitored media focused on campaign dynamics, which mainly involved mutual attacks between candidates. Further, the limited coverage in news programmes, coupled with the lack of clear distinction between different formats of coverage, impacted voters' ability to make an informed choice.

### **Participation of National Minorities**

National minorities constitute over 10 per cent of the population, with Hungarians (6 per cent) and Roma (3.4 per cent) being the largest groups. The Constitution guarantees the rights of national minorities, including political representation and the use of minority languages in education and in communication with local authorities where over 20 per cent of the population uses the language. At odds with international good practice, the law does not specifically provide for election materials or voter education in minority languages, and in practice, such materials were not made available.<sup>80</sup>

Roma continue to be underrepresented in public and political life, and face limited access to some public services, which underscores the need for broader state efforts to address systemic barriers. Several Roma organizations also noted that Roma communities are vulnerable to voter coercion. Despite certain state initiatives to address discrimination, including the 2021 legislation prohibiting 'anti-Gypsyism', several CSOs reported an increasingly intolerant environment affecting various minority groups.<sup>81</sup> No candidate who identified as belonging to a national minority group stood for election. RMDSZ/UDMR actively campaigned in Hungarian for the coalition government's candidate, who was also supported by all other minority parties in the parliament.

### **Election Dispute Resolution**

Complaints and appeals are adjudicated by electoral bureaus or judicial authorities, with the applicable avenue depending on the issue.<sup>82</sup> While the law allows complaints against decisions or inaction by electoral bureaus to be submitted to the respective bureau and appealed to the next-higher level, the ODIHR LEOM observed divergent interpretations of this provision across CoEBs.<sup>83</sup> The law establishes an expedited procedure, requiring that appeals and decisions be resolved within one to three days, in line with international good practice.

The legislation suggests that most CEB decisions are final; however, the CCR interpreted its competence as that of a court of last resort in instances where no other remedy is available, covering all

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<sup>79</sup> On *România TV*, Ms. Lasconi only received 3 per cent of the coverage, largely in neutral or positive tone.

<sup>80</sup> Romania has ratified the Council of Europe's [Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#). The Convention's [Thematic Commentary on Participation](#) in paragraph 77 recommends that states consider producing ballots and electoral materials including national minority languages.

<sup>81</sup> For example, a Roma NGO, which conducted voter education and election observation during previous elections, reported to the ODIHR LEOM that it had been targeted with threats of violence by an extremist group.

<sup>82</sup> In addition, 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. These decisions can be appealed with the Bucharest Court of Appeal (BCoA) within 48 hours from the publication. 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.

<sup>83</sup> While some CoEBs stated that complaints should be submitted to the higher-level electoral bureau, others informed the LEOM that they adjudicate complaints filed against their own decisions. The CEB informed the ODIHR LEOM that complaints may be submitted either to the higher-level bureau or to the bureau whose decision is being challenged, at the discretion of the complainant.

stages of the electoral process.<sup>84</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. In this electoral process, CCR ruled in 61 cases challenging candidate registrations and rejections.

Most complaints and appeals concerned online political advertising and were primarily adjudicated by the CEB and the Bucharest Court of Appeal (BCoA) (*see also Election Campaign*).<sup>85</sup> Before election day, the CEB adjudicated 39 complaints and appeals concerning the composition of EBs and campaign violations, upholding 10 of them, as well as 1,479 complaints related to campaigning on VLOPs. Thirty-eight of these CEB decisions were contested at the BCoA, which upheld all of them. Lower-level bureaus published 292 decisions adjudicating complaints and appeals, mainly related to the appointment of EBs, campaign violations, and breaches of personal data protection regulations. Under the framework introduced by GEO 1/2025, no specific deadline is prescribed for the BCoA when adjudicating appeals against CEB decisions related to online political advertising; nonetheless, the BCoA ruled in most cases within one day of receipt. Some plaintiffs and the CEB raised concerns that this short timeframe did not allow sufficient time for the preparation and submission of a substantive defence and response to the defence submissions. Nine BCoA rulings were further challenged in front of High Court of Cassation and Justice, which rejected all of them.

Overall, electoral disputes were handled efficiently and within the prescribed deadlines, and adjudicating bodies enjoyed a high level of public trust, with some concerns raised about the adjudication of online campaign-related complaints by the CEB. However, transparency in the resolution of electoral disputes was limited, as most complaints were adjudicated by election bureaus in closed sessions, contrary to a previous ODIHR recommendation and international good practice.<sup>86</sup> While decisions were generally published on the websites of election bureaus within one day, they lacked details of deliberations and sufficient reasoning, and were not presented in a user-friendly format. While court hearings were open to the public, rulings were adopted *in camera*.

## **Election Observation**

The legislation permits citizen and international observers to follow election-day procedures and certain aspects of postal voting. However, it does not explicitly provide for access to other stages of the electoral process, at odds with international good practice.<sup>87</sup> In an inclusive process, the PEA accredited 53 civil society and 30 international organizations and other foreign entities. Contributing to the transparency of the process, several CSOs conducted long-term observation activities, despite growing operational and financial challenges.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</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 EBs 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 BCoA.

<sup>85</sup> Before the Court, plaintiffs frequently argued that the CEB's rulings contravened the Constitution and infringed upon freedom of expression, asserting that such determinations should fall within the exclusive competence of judicial bodies rather than administrative authorities such as the CEB. The constitutionality of Articles 16 and 17 of the GEO No. 1/2025 were challenged at the CCR for violating rule of law and freedom of expression. This item was not put on the CCR agenda before election day.

<sup>86</sup> Section II.3.1.81 of the 2002 [Code of Good Practice](#) states that "meetings of the central electoral commission should be open to everyone, including the media".

<sup>87</sup> Paragraph II.3.2 of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that "both national and international observers should be given the widest possible opportunity to participate in an election observation exercise. Observation must not be confined to the election day itself, but must include the registration period of candidates and, if necessary, of electors, as well as the electoral campaign."

<sup>88</sup> The largest citizen observer coalition, *VotCorect* deployed some 550 observers on election day and operated a citizen consultation hotline. *Transparency International Romania* monitored political and campaign finance; *Funky Citizens* primarily focused on the online environment and the legal framework.

To be accredited, civil society organizations must be legally established at least six months prior to election day and demonstrate a record of engagement in the promotion of democracy. Political parties and pre-electoral coalitions that have nominated candidates but lack representatives in the EBs may delegate proxies to observe election-day procedures; this right is not extended to independent candidates. ODIHR LEOM interlocutors noted that such limitations may have, in some cases, led to certain civil society organizations misusing observer status by registering individuals who effectively acted as proxies for contestants.

## **Election Day**

The IEOM observed opening, voting, and counting in a limited number of polling stations across the country; however, in line with the methodology for limited election observation missions, it did not conduct a systematic or comprehensive assessment of election day proceedings. The atmosphere in and around polling stations visited was calm and orderly, with occasional queues. During the day, several candidates and party leaders made political statements, resembling their campaign messages, which were disseminated in the media and online.<sup>89</sup>

The limited number of polling stations visited by the IEOM opened on time, with the process generally assessed as efficient and well organized. Election bureau members were knowledgeable and well-prepared, procedures were largely followed, and all essential materials were in place. In line with the law, voters could cast their ballot at any polling station outside their territorial-administrative unit by being added to supplementary voter lists, upon confirmation of registration and verification that they had not already voted. This option was used by 2,193,886 voters (23 per cent), particularly in urban areas.

In the polling stations visited, voting was generally conducted in an orderly, transparent, and professional manner, with the process running efficiently. The atmosphere inside and outside polling stations was peaceful, with some procedural shortcomings observed. IEOM observers noted in the limited number of polling stations visited that the secrecy of the vote was not always fully ensured due to the placement of voting booths, the quality of the ballot paper, or the manner in which voters inserted their ballots in the ballot box. At times, this made it possible to discern voters' choices. In some cases, ballot boxes were not properly sealed. Campaign materials were noted near some polling stations.

The presence of observers and party representatives, noted in some polling stations, contributed to transparency. As independent candidates are not permitted to delegate proxies, some individuals accredited as observers appeared to act on behalf of political actors, questioning their role as independent observers. Polling staff and police did not always fully understand the role of observers and, in some cases, did not promptly grant access to polling stations. Police officers were frequently present inside the polling stations visited without invitation from chairpersons, and at times checked observers' accreditations on their own initiative, in contradiction to legal provisions. Other unauthorized persons, such as mayors, were also seen inside and outside some polling stations. Despite legal requirements on accessibility and PEA reports indicating nearly 98 per cent compliance, several polling stations visited by the IEOM did not allow for independent access for persons with disabilities.

In the limited number of places where the IEOM observed counting and tabulation, the process was, with a few exceptions, efficiently organized. However, IEOM observers were denied access to counting in one polling station and to tabulation in two CoEBs. While most of the observed EBs had no difficulties with results reconciliation and the completion of protocols, IEOM observers noted

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<sup>89</sup> In several cases, the media interviewed contestants after they voted and aired their statements. At times, voting and related statements were live-streamed on social media by or on behalf of some candidates. In addition, several online news portals published exit polls during voting hours, in contravention of the law.

occasional deviations from procedures, including opening ballot boxes before counting unused ballots or signatures on the voter lists, or not counting them at all. Tabulation at the CoEB level was generally assessed as smooth.

On election day, the CEB considered and posted decisions on more than 226 complaints related to online content.<sup>90</sup> In addition, throughout the day, the ODIHR LEOM received limited information on more than 20 complaints filed by voters and citizen observer groups with electoral bureaus; however, this information was not uniformly or consistently published on the websites of the electoral bureaus, limiting transparency. The Ministry of Internal Affairs reported 312 cases of election-related violations, including two instances of alleged vote buying.<sup>91</sup> On election day, ANCOM informed the public about continued efforts to address disinformation campaigns on social networks.<sup>92</sup>

Contributing to transparency, election results were published live online. By the morning of 5 May, 99 per cent of results had been aggregated, and copies of EB result protocols were available on the PEA website. Voter turnout was announced at 53.21 per cent. Preliminary results indicate a second round to take place on 18 May.

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

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<sup>90</sup> Of these, 140 complaints were dismissed. In 86 cases, decisions were taken to remove a total of 159 posts. AUR filed five complaints, PNL submitted two and PSD one; all of these, except one from AUR, were accepted. All other complaints were submitted by individuals. Nearly all removed posts contained calls to vote for specific candidates, and some included content assessed as disinformation.

<sup>91</sup> In most cases, these were related to breaches of campaign silence, photographing ballots, and minor infractions concerning public order. The police also informed the public that 50 possible election-related incidents were reported before election day and overnight, including 34 cases of continued campaigning and 2 of alleged vote buying.

<sup>92</sup> Through a [statement](#) published on the Ministry of Internal Affairs website, ANCOM indicated that, pursuant to an ongoing inter-institutional investigation, a coordinated disinformation campaign on social networks, allegedly intended to incite public panic, amplify anti-system sentiment, and deter electoral participation, has been identified and led to joint measures by the competent authorities to restrict access to the malicious content.

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**MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Bucharest, 5 May 2025 – This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is the result of a common endeavour involving the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). The assessment was made to determine whether the elections complied with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation.

Lucie Potůčková (Czechia) served as Head of the OSCE PA delegation and was appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE PA delegation. Eoghan Murphy (Ireland) is the Head of the ODIHR LEOM, deployed from 23 March.

This Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is delivered prior to the completion of the electoral process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the electoral process, including the announcement of results, the handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals, and the second round. ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, some eight weeks after the completion of the electoral process. The OSCE PA will present its report at its next Standing Committee meeting.

The ODIHR LEOM includes 13 experts in the capital and 22 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. On election day, 47 observers from 21 countries were deployed, including a 7-member delegation from the OSCE PA. Opening was observed in 11 polling stations and voting was observed in 145 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 13 polling stations, and the tabulation in 9 CoEBs.

The IEOM wishes to thank the authorities for their invitation to observe the elections, and the Permanent Electoral Bureau, the Central Electoral Bureau and the Ministry of External Affairs for their assistance. They also express their appreciation to other state institutions, political parties, media and civil society organizations, and the international community representatives for their co-operation.

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