



Presidential elections in Romania and the battle between West and East



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Cover: Elena Lasconi, source: USR Facebook page, NATO flag, source: Canva, Calin Georgescu, source: Calin Georgescu Facebook page, Moscow Victory Day Parade, source: Wikipedia

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The first round of the presidential elections in Romania, held on November 24, brought 2 surprises. First place for the independent candidate Calin Georgescu and second place for the new leader of an opposition party, Elena Lasconi, the mayor of a small town in Romania. She managed to rank second, spectacularly overtaking the current Prime Minister in office, Marcel Ciolacu, leader of Romania's largest party, the Social Democratic Party (PSD).



Source: Calin Georgescu Facebook page

Calin Georgescu was born on March 26, 1962 and studied at the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine in Bucharest, where he obtained his PhD at the same university. He started his career in 1991 at the Ministry of Environment, reaching the position of Secretary General in this ministry, and between 2000-2011 he was Executive Director of the National Center for Sustainable Development. After that he worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then he was Executive Director of the Institute for Projects, Innovation and Development.¹ His name first appeared on the list

¹ Adrian Ilie, Cine este Călin Georgescu, surpriza alegerilor prezidențiale 2024 turul 1. E primul calificat în finală (translation in English: Who is Călin Georgescu, the surprise of the 2024 presidential elections, round 1. He is the first to qualify for the final), Hotnews, 25.11.2024; <https://hotnews.ro/cine-este-calin-georgescu-surpriza-alegerilor-prezidentiale-2024-turul-1-e-aproape-de-finala-alegerilor-prezidentiale-1843454>;

as a potential prime minister in 2011 and 2012 as a technocrat to replace the Prime Minister Emil Boc. He made a strong comeback in the public space in 2020 when the far-right, ultra-nationalist Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) party managed to get into Parliament. On this occasion, AUR proposed him as an independent prime minister, taking into account that he was a specialist in sustainable development. In 2021, during a political crisis in Romania, his name was mentioned as the AUR's prime minister. The AUR distanced itself from him after a series of controversial statements in which he defended the legionary leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (leader of Romanian fascism in the interwar period) and Marshal Ion Antonescu, convicted for war crimes at the end of World War II. After leaving AUR, Calin Georgescu did not ally with another party and decided to run as an independent in the 2024 elections.

Calin Georgescu spoke out against NATO saying that this alliance does not offer Romania security guarantees. He also said about the Deveselu missile defense shield, which is part of the US and NATO anti-missile system, that "The Deveselu Shield is a diplomatic embarrassment."² He has an ultra-conservative, almost mystical approach, saying that Romania has to get along with everyone, also with Russia and China. Relevant for Calin Georgescu's profile is the following quote: "Romania's chance is Russian wisdom."³

In fact, the first comments of the Russian press about the outcome of the Romanian elections were laudatory: "Georgescu's results were a surprise, as the polls gave him little chance. He campaigned on TikTok, defended traditional values, but also glorified Romania's army, which sided with the Nazis in World War II, and believes that NATO membership cannot guarantee Romania's security, advocating an alliance with Russia".⁴

The same was said by the pro-Russian former president of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon „In Romania, the idea of National Interest – sovereignty, economic protection, Christian traditions and values – came first.”⁵

² Idem;

³ Calin Georgescu, in an interview on Metropola TV in April 2021

⁴ Ria Novosti, available at: <https://ria.ru/20241125/rumyniya-1985552131.html>

⁵ Igor Dodon Facebook page,

[https://www.facebook.com/dodon.igor/posts/pfbid02Ka4MUjkbDXiqntyppQmAtuhiFqx9nCaHHMQSaRN9XXmGpz32T1mvDLeWPnGz7xjl?_cft__\[0\]=AZVggvgfeJY3vXrSamtbdVF0l0GHk1UoMcSuLlhQNJ8Oi2FXgHaupg6zMX7joi_oymKqAJNNU9Y_sRL4V2hKBYTxF17VqrQSqIDt7YdAq7YmWDV-82gFpbU1_r0klq3PskLeIW2cPiTx-VicDvTbgN-s&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/dodon.igor/posts/pfbid02Ka4MUjkbDXiqntyppQmAtuhiFqx9nCaHHMQSaRN9XXmGpz32T1mvDLeWPnGz7xjl?_cft__[0]=AZVggvgfeJY3vXrSamtbdVF0l0GHk1UoMcSuLlhQNJ8Oi2FXgHaupg6zMX7joi_oymKqAJNNU9Y_sRL4V2hKBYTxF17VqrQSqIDt7YdAq7YmWDV-82gFpbU1_r0klq3PskLeIW2cPiTx-VicDvTbgN-s&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R)



Source: USR.ro

Elena Lasconi was born on April 20, 1972. She is a former journalist and a charismatic figure who serves as the mayor of a small town in the Muntenia region of Romania, Campulung Muscel. She delivers a sharp, at times strident, critique of her opponents, aiming to position herself as the sole viable candidate for the center-right electorate to represent their interests against the left. While she lacks experience in foreign affairs, her public remarks on security and defense issues in various contexts have appeared somewhat very basic and unprepared. Nonetheless, she has demonstrated an ability to adapt, firmly committed to support NATO and EU membership, strategic partnership with the US and support for Ukraine.

Although the political dynamics are still ongoing as parties prepare for the parliamentary elections on December 1 and the second round of the presidential elections on December 8, some conclusions can be drawn:

1. The presidential election vote represents an anti-establishment vote directed against the mainstream parties and the way they have done politics so far. Both candidates in the second round are anti-establishment politicians who have been critical of the way Romania's mainstream parties, the Social Democratic Party (center-left) and the National Liberal Party (center-right), have governed.
2. In the second round on December 8, there will be a confrontation between the sovereignist and anti-western option, which would turn Romania into an uncertain ally of NATO and the EU, represented by Calin Georgescu and the pro-western and democratic option represented by Elena Lasconi.
3. Calin Georgescu is the big surprise of this election because no opinion poll even credited him with a chance of entering the 2nd round.

4. He is a candidate who has been created by social media, mainly by Tik Tok, with a huge increase in his visibility during the campaign and especially in the last two weeks. It is not known who financed this campaign and how much it cost, Calin Georgescu said that he did not spend anything in his election campaign.
5. Taking into account the small difference between the 2nd and 3rd places, it remains to be seen to what extent PSD will not ask for the recounting of the annulled votes. This is the first time in the history of democracy in Romania after 1989 when PSD would not have a candidate in the presidential final.
6. Another big loser of the presidential elections is the mainstream National Liberal Party, whose candidate Nicolae Ciuca, president of the Senate and former prime minister, was only in 5th place with 8,79%. These elections are marked by the entry of several independent candidates in the race, the most notorious being Mircea Geoana, former Deputy NATO Secretary General and career diplomat, who was initially quoted with 30%, but he collapsed during the campaign, obtaining only 6,32%, failing to capitalize the discontent without the current political system.
7. The result of the first round of the presidential elections and the first place of a candidate who would blow up Romania's foreign and security policy is also the failure of the 10 years of the mandate of the current president Klaus Iohannis. Elected 10 years ago through a spectacular victory against the leader of the PSD at the time, the prime minister Victor Ponta, President Iohannis had in recent years a deficient communication policy that distanced him from the citizens. He preferred a deep silence in many times when the president had to communicate, and the confidence of the president decreased considerably.
8. The presidential elections will also have an impact on the parliamentary elections. It remains to be seen how much the sovereignist and anti-western option will take in the elections, as the two parties promoting such a policy, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) and SOS Romania seem to have an electoral base of around 35%-40% at this point. Accustomed until now Romanians to vote between the left and the right, now there are basically 3 poles that are created, which will make it difficult to form a stable government, being very possible a left-right alliance after the elections to ensure a stable and democratic majority that will continue the current pro NATO, pro EU, pro Ukraine foreign policy.
9. It will not be easy for the new president to form such a coalition, but it is clear that Elena Lasconi's victory is possible only if the traditional center left and center right come together to vote for her and against a candidate with pro-Russian views. Elections in Romania will have a big geopolitical footprint, a choice between West and East, between the US, UE, NATO on one side, or Russia and China on the other.
10. As the news from the Ukrainian front is not very promising, the new president has to take important decisions for the country's defense. The president will have to negotiate with the Trump's administration to increase the presence of American

troops, to grant 3% of GDP to defense expenditure, to have a frank dialogue with the citizens in order to have popular support for these decisions. At the same time, Romania must also increase its naval capabilities to deter Russia's aggressive behavior in the Black Sea and to protect its economic interests in its Exclusive Economic Zone. Even if today there would be a frozen conflict, most likely Crimea will remain occupied by Russia and this will make Moscow to have an aggressive behavior in the naval domain in the Black Sea, which will represent a challenge for NATO, but especially for Romania.

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