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Romanian Presidential Hopeful with Suspected Moscow Ties Blocked from Election Re-Run

By Madeleine Cuckson

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Former Romanian presidential candidate Calin Georgescu speaks during a protest in Bucharest. **Robert Ghement / EPA / TASS**

Romanian far-right presidential frontrunner Calin Georgescu has been blocked from running in the May re-run of the country's presidential election, the Central Electoral Bureau (BEC) announced Sunday.

The removal of Georgescu, who Romanian authorities suspect of having ties to Russia, from the ballot comes after months of speculation following the Constitutional Court's controversial decision to annul the Romanian election in December 2024.

Last month, Georgescu was stopped by police on his way to apply for candidacy and indicted on charges related to "incitement to actions against the constitutional order."

This comes shortly after U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance's speech in Munich which criticized the election's annulment, declaring it a violation of free speech. Georgescu has called it "a political case."

The 62-year-old former agriculturist sent shockwaves across the country in November 2024 when the independent candidate who is known for believing conspiracy theories such as denying the moon landing, won 23% of the vote in the first round of Romania's presidential election, advancing to a runoff against the Save Romania Union (USR) party candidate Elena Lasconi.

The recount of the 9.4 million votes cast in the first round in December invited mocking public remarks from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"One candidate did not please the authorities, and they decided to repeat the vote count," Putin said.

The election was annulled soon after, two days before the final round was set to take place on the grounds of undeclared financing associated with Georgescu, who incorrectly claimed he had zero financing, and suspected foreign interference.

USR party leader Lasconi on Monday lashed out against what she called a lack of transparency regarding Sunday's decision to pull Georgescu from the re-run vote.

"The BEC must urgently come up with explanations... there is no legal argument on the table for this candidacy to be rejected," Lasconi wrote on X.

Investigations into Georgescu's possible ties to Russia have intensified in recent weeks. This month, the foreign ministry declared Russia's military attaché to Romania Viktor Makovskiy and his deputy Yevgeni Ignatiev personae non grata. Ignatiev's name reportedly appears in documents connected to Georgescu.

"Even if he was being funded or supported by Russia, I would support Georgescu, though I was never a Russia lover," 43-year-old Florin from Romania's city of Cluj-Napoca told The Moscow Times.

Florin has been following Georgescu and like-minded politicians including Romania's Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) party since 2020.

"We, Romanians, want a change very badly because we realized that all the parties that were governing us since 1989 were playing an ugly theatrical show that made our lives worse," he added.

Before Sunday's decision, Georgescu had been polling at 41%.

"I am very disappointed, not because Georgescu is not able to participate but because our biggest fear has been revealed as a disappointing truth: there is no democracy. It doesn't make sense to vote," Florin said after Georgescu was blocked from the ballot.

While Romania's Constitutional Court declassified some evidence suggesting Russian involvement in the December election, critical elements remain unknown, fueling public

skepticism and distrust in the government.

A declassified Supreme Council of National Defense (CSAT) report confirmed that a TikTok campaign worth more than $1 million was funded by a "non-state actor" to influence Romania's elections.

"The candidate also benefited from preferential treatment on social media platforms, which had the effect of distorting the manifestation of voters' will," the document said.

The European Parliament, in response to the election fiasco last winter, summoned Tiktok's CEO, who acknowledged removing a "cluster" of accounts violating election policies. The company confirmed that many had "pro-Russia" leanings but did not disclose further details.

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Georgescu has denied ties to the Kremlin, but his rhetoric and associations tell a different story. He has in the past praised Putin, calling him "a man who loves his country," and has never publicly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. His pre-campaign Tiktoks also featured a Putinesque video of him riding horseback and practicing judo, one of Putin's favorite sports.

Italy's Intelligence System for Security (AISE) reported this month that Russian state actors had been responsible for 34 hybrid attacks targeting Romania's election process. Throughout the election, they reported 85,000 cyberattacks on electoral infrastructure traced to Kremlin-linked servers in 33 countries as well as the creation of 25,000 bot accounts on TikTok.

Another case for Georgescu's ties to Russia is via his head of security, Horatiu Potra, who has drawn comparisons to the late Russian Wagner mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Potra, a former mercenary, managed his own militant group in the Congo like Prigozhin. He and his mercenaries were reportedly referred to as "the Russians," a blanket term used by the Congolese for white European fighters.

Potra's home was raided by police, uncovering cash, Moscow-bound plane tickets from September and a portrait of a Chechen militant known for boasting about killing Ukrainians. His girlfriend, Dorina Mihai, was also photographed alongside Chechen mercenaries in Moscow in September 2024 and has posted pro-Russian messages online, including birthday wishes to Putin.

During Romania's December elections, Russian ultra-nationalist and pro-Putin ideologue Alexander Dugin wrote on X: "Romania will be part of Russia."

Some interpreted the comment as evidence of Russian interference in Romania's election. Georgescu later praised Dugin in an interview as "a really well-structured guy intellectually."

It has been confirmed that the two met in Vienna in 2014. Leaked documents from Dugin's computer obtained by Ukrainian hackers listed 24 Romanians affiliated with Russian interests in attendance, including Georgescu.

“While these elements raise questions, they do not necessarily constitute definitive proof of a direct link between Georgescu and Russia,” Bucharest-based political analyst Radu Magdin told The Moscow Times.

The right wing-AUR party is now in discussion with Georgescu on how to proceed in the coming election without him in the race.

“I have one message left! If democracy in Romania falls, the entire democratic world will fall! This is just the beginning. It’s that simple,” Georgescu wrote on X in response to Sunday’s decision.

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