

INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION Romania – Presidential Election, Second Round, 18 May 2025

STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

In a strongly contested run-off, fundamental freedoms of assembly and association were respected; however, defamatory rhetoric, a lack of direct debates between the candidates in the official campaign, biased coverage by some media outlets, and the persistent use of inauthentic behaviour online, including to amplify or suppress messages of both candidates, limited voters' ability to make an informed choice. Technical preparations for the second round were professional and efficient, despite continuing limited transparency in the work of the election administration. Legal gaps, including the lack of regulation of the period between the first-round election day and the start of the official second-round campaign, led to uncertainty regarding permissible political activities, campaign finance rules, and media coverage, impacting the participation of other political parties. The campaign remained dominated by online activities, with messaging often centred on polarizing themes and personal attacks. Disinformation and misinformation circulated extensively, including about the electoral process, requiring the authorities to respond publicly on a number of occasions. Public trust was affected by fragmented institutional responses, which insufficiently addressed the growing spread of inauthentic behaviour, and related complaints. Election day was generally calm and professionally conducted in the limited number of polling stations observed by the IEOM, with some procedural inconsistencies noted that did not affect the overall positive assessment, while accessibility challenges persisted.

The first round of the repeat presidential election was held on 4 May. As no candidate secured the majority of votes from all registered voters as required by law, George Simion of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) and independent candidate Nicușor Dan advanced to the second round. The governing coalition's candidate did not qualify for the run-off, which prompted the resignation of Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu. Given that the two leading candidates positioned themselves as anti-system, the first-round results were widely interpreted by the general public as indicative of public dissatisfaction with established political parties and the 'ruling elite'. The overall environment remained polarized between the two rounds. This period also saw an escalation in hostile rhetoric against candidates, associating them with sexual and ethnic minority groups in a negative manner. There were some occurrences of anti-minority rhetoric and acts.

The legal framework regulates key procedural aspects of the electoral process, including the second round; however, certain aspects of the campaign regulations and media coverage in this period are ambiguous or insufficiently regulated. While some authorities issued decisions and public statements in an effort to address these issues, legal gaps and inconsistencies persisted, undermining legal certainty for key stakeholders and, in some instances, leading to inconsistent interpretation by political parties and candidates, and a lack of oversight and transparency.

The election administration implemented the process efficiently and within legal deadlines. However, transparency remained limited, as sessions continued to be closed, and information published by electoral bureaus was at times incomplete or inconsistent. The election administration did not take measures to address shortcomings identified in the first round, including concerns related to the quality of ballot paper. By law, independent candidates are not entitled to nominate members to Electoral Bureaus (EBs) or have proxies at polling stations; however, endorsements from several political parties resulted in Mr. Dan's *de facto* representation on EBs. To ensure the timely return of postal ballots from out-of-country voters – who could request this voting method only before the first round – postal voting

packs for both rounds were sent in advance, enabling voters to cast their second-round ballots even prior to the first election day, potentially compromising the integrity of the postal voting process.

The five-day interim period between the first round and the start of the official campaign for the second round was not regulated with regard to political activities, limiting safeguards against campaign violations and impacting legal certainty. In practice, both candidates and several political parties resumed voter outreach immediately after election day, and materials distributed in this period did not bear the labelling required during official campaign periods, limiting accountability. Freedom of assembly and association continued to be respected. Campaign messaging centred on ‘national’ versus ‘European’ values and the economy, defence, and social issues. Over the course of the campaign, the tone grew increasingly negative and often personal, even aggressive. Several first-round candidates and political parties publicly endorsed Mr. Dan, but some noted uncertainty about which campaign activities were legally allowed in supporting the candidate, which impacted their political participation.

Inauthentic behaviour aimed at amplifying or suppressing both candidates’ messages, as well as the dissemination of disinformation, persisted. Although platforms proactively removed some online content assessed by them as inauthentic, significant volumes remained accessible, and the transparency of their activities remained limited. Civil society organizations and the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported substantially more cases of disinformation and inauthentic behaviour to platforms than in the first round. The CEB received over 3,900 complaints, mostly related to inauthentic accounts, and unlabelled posts by alleged ‘political actors’, resulting in 2,600 content-removal decisions concerning 3,600 posts. In some cases, it continued to apply expansive definitions of ‘political actor’, which may have had a chilling effect on genuine civic activism. Overall, the continued prevalence of inauthentic behaviour, including surrounding both candidates’ campaigns, indicated that responses by platforms and authorities remained fragmented and insufficient to effectively mitigate such behaviour, which impacted voters’ ability to make an informed choice.

The legal framework does not regulate the financial aspects of the period between the first-round election day and the official start of the second-round campaign, impacting transparency and accountability. Both candidates incurred online advertising expenses in this period. By law, contribution and expenditure limits were set at 50 per cent of the first-round ceiling, which appeared to be disproportionate to the eight-day campaign period. In line with its first-round practice, the PEA continued to publish campaign finance data based on contestants’ reports, which contributed to transparency. In this period, only one candidate declared expenses. The PEA did not conduct additional financial compliance checks prior to the second round but has initiated sanctioning procedures against individuals involved in third-party financing of online campaigning, in coordination with law enforcement.

The media regulator, the National Audiovisual Council (CNA), extended the silence-period ban on election-related broadcasts to the interim period before the official start of the second-round campaign. However, this interpretation was communicated late in the process and not supported by a formal decision, undermining legal foreseeability. In practice, during this period, most broadcasters aired election-related content. During the second-round campaign, the CNA continued to review complaints in a transparent manner but adopted some decisions late in the process, impacting the effectiveness of the remedy. Moreover, the CNA did not conduct quantitative media monitoring, which, combined with an overall ineffective sanctioning system, weakened oversight of campaign coverage. ODIHR LEOM media monitoring indicated that the public broadcaster offered fairly balanced and neutral coverage to both candidates, while most private channels showed partisan bias by favouring one candidate or the other.

One first-round presidential candidate challenged the validity of the first-round results, claiming unequal conditions and unlawful campaigning by both advancing candidates. The Constitutional Court

dismissed the complaint, in a session that was closed to the public without justification, in contravention to the law, limiting transparency. Courts and election administration adjudicated a number of complaints in an efficient and timely manner overall. However, transparency remained limited, as most complaints were adjudicated by electoral bureaus in closed sessions. In some cases, the Bucharest Court of Appeal allowed very limited time for responses and issued rulings immediately after the hearing, which, combined with concerns raised by several stakeholders that the time for resolving disputes related to online content was too short to allow for the adequate presentation of legal arguments, impacted the quality of due process, mainly in cases related to online content, at odds with OSCE commitments.

In line with its methodology, 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, well-organized, and professionally conducted. Polling staff were well prepared, but observers noted some procedural inconsistencies that did not affect the overall positive assessment, including with regard to vote secrecy, the sealing of ballot boxes, and voter identification procedures. Unauthorized individuals, including police and local officials, were present in a few stations observed. The accessibility of polling stations for persons with disabilities remained a serious concern. Counting and tabulation were swift, and results were published promptly online in multiple formats, but in a few instances, the IEOM observers reported inconsistent adherence to certain procedures and had limited access to clearly observe the process. The CEB considered and published decisions on over 150 complaints related to online content, while the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported over 240, generally minor election-related violations.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background and Post-First Round Developments

The first round of the repeat presidential election took place on 4 May. Preliminary results published by the Central Electoral Bureau (CEB) on 5 May indicated that no candidate had secured a first-round victory. George Simion of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), with 41 per cent of the votes cast, and independent candidate Nicușor Dan, with 21 per cent, advanced to the second round.¹

Following the preliminary results, which showed that the governing coalition's candidate had not qualified for the run-off, Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu resigned, and the Social Democratic Party (PSD) announced its withdrawal from the coalition. On 6 May, acting President Ilie Bolojan appointed Minister of Interior Cătălin Predoiu of the National Liberal Party (PNL) as acting prime minister to lead the government during the electoral period. On 9 May, one day beyond the legal deadline, the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) rejected a complaint challenging the validity of the first round, announced the official results, and set the second round for 18 May (see also *Election Dispute Resolution*).²

The results of the first round were widely interpreted as indicative of public dissatisfaction with established political parties and the 'ruling elite'.³ The interim period saw an escalation of hostile

¹ By law, if no presidential candidate obtains an absolute majority of votes from all registered voters in the first round, a second round is held two weeks later between the two candidates who received the most votes. The candidate who obtains the highest number of votes cast in the second round is elected.

² Of the valid votes cast, Mr. Simion received 40.96 per cent, Mr. Dan 20.99 per cent, Crin Antonescu 20.07 per cent, Victor Ponta 13.04 per cent, Elena Lasconi 2.68 per cent, Marcela-Lavinia Șandru 0.64 per cent, Petru-Daniel Funeriu 0.53 per cent, Cristian-Vasile Terheș 0.39 per cent, Sebastian-Constantin Popescu 0.28 per cent, John-Ion Banu-Muscel 0.23 per cent, and Silviu Predoiu 0.18 per cent. Voter turnout was announced at 53 per cent.

³ Both remaining contenders had positioned themselves as 'anti-system' and together obtained over 60 per cent of the votes cast; the second round featured no candidate representing a 'traditional' political party.

rhetoric against candidates, associating them with sexual and ethnic minority groups in a negative manner. In addition, there were some occurrences of anti-minority rhetoric and acts, leading the Permanent Electoral Authority (PEA) to issue a statement reiterating the legal ban on discriminatory messages and actions inciting religious or ethnic defamation and hatred.⁴ The second round took place in a polarized environment, marked by intensified public discourse on issues of national identity and ‘traditional’ values, as well as ongoing debate over the annulment of the November 2024 presidential election. Several first-round candidates and political parties, including those whose candidates did not advance to the second round, endorsed Mr. Dan.⁵

Legal Framework

The legal framework regulates key procedural aspects of the second round, including the timeline for technical preparations for voting, the composition and functioning of the election administration, voter registration, and the accreditation of observers. However, certain aspects of the campaign regulations and media coverage are ambiguous or insufficiently regulated.⁶

While some institutions issued decisions and public statements in an effort to address these shortcomings, such measures were, on some occasions, not comprehensive or timely. Overall, legal gaps and inconsistencies persisted during the second round, undermining legal certainty for key stakeholders and, in some instances, leading to inconsistent interpretation by political parties and candidates, as well as a lack of oversight and transparency (see also *Election Campaign, Campaign Finance and Media*).

Election Administration

The election administration, headed by the Permanent Electoral Authority (PEA) and a temporary structure of electoral bureaus led by the Central Electoral Bureau (CEB), began technical preparations for the second round immediately after the first round, and administered the process efficiently and in a timely manner. However, the transparency of election administration remained limited, as sessions continued to be closed to the public, observers, and candidate representatives, and the information published by election bureaus was at times incomplete or inconsistent. No specific measures were taken to address shortcomings identified in the first round, such as concerns about ballot quality.⁷

The law does not specifically regulate the reconstitution of electoral bureaus between rounds. In practice, parliamentary parties – which had priority in nominating electoral bureau (EB) members under the law – generally retained their representatives in the second round, regardless of whether they supported either remaining candidate. As an independent, Mr. Dan was not entitled to nominate EB members; however, endorsements from several parties led to his *de facto* representation in polling stations.⁸ A number of EB chairpersons and deputies were replaced due to resignations, reportedly due to inadequate remuneration, or, in some cases, as a result of disciplinary actions stemming from the first

⁴ See the PEA [statement](#) of 9 May.

⁵ Prior to the first round, Mr. Simion was endorsed by the Young People’s Party (POT), and Mr. Dan was supported by five non-parliamentary parties. Prior to the run-off, Mr. Dan received endorsements from the Save Romania Union (USR), PNL, and the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ/UDMR). In addition, two first round candidates, Daniel Funeriu and Elena Lasconi also endorsed him. On 12 May, Interim President Ilie Bolojan also announced his support for Mr. Dan.

⁶ Moreover, procedural requirements related to postal voting are incompatible with the general timeframe applicable to the second round of presidential elections.

⁷ The PEA acknowledged concerns that the ballot paper may allow a voter’s choice to be visible on the reverse side, but stated that, due to budgetary constraints and procurement difficulties, alternative materials could not be secured within the available timeframe.

⁸ Out of the seven representatives nominated by parliamentary political parties in each EB, three represented parties that endorsed Mr. Dan (PNL, RMDSZ/UDMR, and USR), two supported Mr. Simion (AUR and POT), and two did not endorse any candidate.

round.⁹ Positively, replacements were swiftly approved by the respective County Electoral Bureaus (CoEBs) from pre-selected reserve lists and most were provided with online training. Training sessions observed by ODIHR LEOM were assessed as comprehensive but not interactive. According to the PEA, no refresher training was held for EB members who had served in the first round.

Out-of-country voting resumed from 16 to 18 May in diplomatic representations and other designated locations abroad. Postal voting was available only to citizens who had requested it prior to the first round.¹⁰ To ensure the timely return of ballots, the election administration delivered postal voting packs for both rounds together, each containing two ballots listing all first-round candidates for both rounds.¹¹ Voters could return their second-round ballots at any time, including prior to the first election day or before the official confirmation of the second-round candidates, potentially compromising the integrity of the postal voting process.¹²

According to the PEA, between 5 and 12 May, municipalities were permitted to update the voter lists with data on individuals who turned 18 between the two rounds, and those who were disenfranchised by court decisions due to mental disability or criminal conviction, lost or acquired citizenship, or had died. The number of voters registered for the second round was 17,988,218 in country and 1,016,327 abroad.¹³ Citing the limited timeframe, the PEA did not conduct supplementary voter education; however, it issued some press releases reiterating that electoral preparations and voting procedures remained unchanged.

The law does not permit independent candidates to delegate proxies to polling stations. Observers and political party proxies accredited prior to the first round were permitted to monitor voting on the second-round election day, regardless of whether their nominating candidate advanced to the run-off. Between the two rounds, only citizen observers and political parties, but not international observers, could register additional representatives.

Election Campaign

The official second-round campaign commenced on 9 May and concluded on 17 May.¹⁴ During the five-day interim period between the first round and the start of the official campaign period, the law does not regulate political and campaign activities, limiting safeguards against campaign violations and impacting legal certainty. Most stakeholders, including oversight bodies, political parties, and contestants, considered political activities unrestricted during this time. Both second-round candidates and some political parties supporting them resumed activities immediately after the first-round election day, and disseminated materials that did not bear the labelling required for official campaign periods, limiting accountability.¹⁵

⁹ The PEA informed that between 4 and 12 May, there were 118 chair, 116 deputy chair, and 263 IT operator replacements. The total number of polling stations was approximately 20,000.

¹⁰ In the second round, 2,691 voters cast their ballots by post.

¹¹ Each postal ballot set included the ballots for both rounds, featuring all first-round candidates; a voter's declaration, envelopes, a "voted" sticker, and instructions for postal voting. By law, postal ballots are considered valid if they arrive to Bucharest no later than 4 days before election day (14 May).

¹² According to the EB dedicated to postal voting, over 15 per cent of the postal ballots cast in the second round were returned to Romania before the first-round election day. Votes cast for candidates who have not advanced to the second round are counted as invalid.

¹³ Some 94,916 voters with reduced mobility voted at home through mobile ballot boxes.

¹⁴ On 9 May, the PEA reaffirmed that the first-round campaign regulations applied during the second-round campaign period: from this time, only posters, audio and video broadcasts, advertisements in the printed press, and printed or online materials were permitted, all subject to mandatory labelling requirements for political advertising introduced by Government Emergency Ordinance (GEO) No. 1/2025.

¹⁵ Between the first-round election and the start of the official second-round campaign, Mr. Simion and Mr. Dan posted online 53 and 40 times, respectively. AUR and POT (which supported Mr. Simion) also posted a total of

Freedom of assembly and association continued to be respected in the campaign.¹⁶ Traditional campaign methods, such as public events, meetings, leaflets, and television appearances, were more visible than in the first round; during the week before election day, Mr. Simion also travelled abroad for high-level engagements and meetings with the diaspora.¹⁷ In the absence of guidance from the authorities, including the CEB, on whether the first-round ban on parties supporting candidates not nominated by the party remained applicable in the second round, parties that endorsed Mr. Dan were uncertain as to the types of campaign support that were permissible under the law, which in some cases led them to adjust or limit their activities, impacting political participation.¹⁸ Both candidates relied extensively on social networking platforms, with Mr. Simion generating significantly higher levels of views and engagements.¹⁹ Campaign messaging mainly focused on personal attacks, with the tone becoming increasingly negative and, on some occasions, aggressive.²⁰ Campaign themes focused on Romania's relationship with the European Union and the United States of America, economic policy, defence, housing, healthcare, and education. These topics were frequently framed within narratives of 'national' versus 'European' values. Only Mr. Dan addressed issues related to gender equality and minority rights.

Disinformation and misinformation circulated extensively online, including claims about a possible annulment or postponement of the election, allegations of electoral fraud, and reports of an alleged assassination attempt on a political figure; these were promptly denied by the authorities.²¹ Civil society fact-checking initiatives identified additional content as disinformation, which was reported to be widely disseminated by influencers and further amplified through partisan news aggregators or networks engaging in inauthentic behaviour.²² Some narratives were assessed by the authorities as disinformation originating outside of Romania.²³

16 times, and PNL, RMDSZ/UDMR and USR posted 42 times. Non-parliamentary parties supporting Mr. Dan posted a total of 51 times. AUR and USR also ran political adverts on Meta, though these did not specifically call for votes for or against candidates.

¹⁶ On 17 May, the Ministry of Internal Affairs [stated](#) it had received 42 complaints regarding possible electoral incidents during the campaign, over half related to poster regulations, and four were referred to electoral authorities for further action.

¹⁷ ODIHR LEOM Long-term Observers (LTOs) noted an increase in flash mobs and leaflet distribution in favour of Mr. Dan and observed four rallies prior to the run-off, the biggest one taking place in Bucharest on 11 May, with the participation of about 20,000 people. On 9 May, a 'pro-European' rally was held in Bucharest and in some other cities, with the participation of thousands of citizens across the country, with many participants expressing support for Mr. Dan.

¹⁸ Previously, in a 23 April press release, the CEB clarified that political parties not fielding a candidate may not produce or disseminate campaign materials promoting or opposing candidates, but may express support through messages to members and supporters; however, the press release did not specify the applicability of this legal interpretation for the second round.

¹⁹ Mr. Dan and Mr. Simion published 305 and 179 campaign-related posts on social media platforms, respectively, while parties and eliminated first-round candidates supporting them published an additional 450 and 75 posts, respectively, including shares of official campaign material. The average number of views of the candidates' top video content daily since 5 May were 1.03 million and 2.13 million, respectively.

²⁰ On 11 May, Mr. Simion made comments related to his post-election day plans that were perceived as threatening by politicians and journalists not sharing his view. On 15 May, Mr. Simion, during a media interview, called his opponent an "autistic, poor guy". Several CSOs condemned this comment and also submitted a complaint at the National Council for Combatting Disinformation.

²¹ The authorities stated that these narratives were spread with the aim of eroding confidence in the election administration, the state institutions and inciting social unrest. The PEA issued press releases to refute these allegations as disinformation on 7 and 12 May, respectively. In the second round, the CNA flagged more than 100 posts to VLOPs as potential disinformation.

²² Civil society organizations such as [Funky Citizens](#) and its fact-checking project, "[Factual](#)", continued to provide updates on disinformation narratives throughout the second round, mainly related to the electoral process. On 9 May, 87 CSOs signed an [open letter](#) rejecting disinformation and hate campaigns against civil society.

²³ Acting President Ilie Bolojan referred to a "hybrid war" of disinformation in a [media](#) interview on 12 May.

Inauthentic online behaviour, including attempts to amplify or suppress candidates' messages, persisted. While Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) proactively restricted some content assessed as inauthentic, a large amount of such content remained accessible.²⁴ Transparency regarding the content moderation practices of VLOPs was limited, as details of enforcement actions and the criteria for content removal were not publicly disclosed. Several civil society organizations (CSOs) continued to monitor and report instances of inauthentic behaviour and disinformation, submitting significantly more reports than in the first round.²⁵

The Ministry of Internal Affairs flagged some 4,800 posts to VLOPs for alleged coordinated inauthentic behaviour, breaches of the electoral legislation and incitement to violence, a substantially higher figure than in the first round.²⁶ Between 5 and 17 May, the CEB received over 3,900 complaints, mainly related to inauthentic accounts, and unlabelled posts by alleged 'political actors', resulting in some 2,600 content-removal decisions on more than 3,600 posts, bringing the total number of removal decisions since the start of the first-round campaign to more than 9,000. When VLOPs decided not to implement the CEB's removal decisions, the affected individuals were not informed that the CEB had found a violation. The CEB continued to use expansive definitions of 'political actor' and 'inauthentic accounts', leading to inconsistent decision-making.²⁷ While this approach enabled it to request the removal of some inauthentic content, it may have continued to exert a chilling effect on genuine civic activism.²⁸ Before the second round, authorities enhanced public awareness efforts about disinformation.²⁹ However, despite an increase in the number of posts flagged by state authorities, the continued prevalence of inauthentic behaviour, including surrounding both candidates' campaigns, indicated that responses by VLOPs and institutions remained fragmented and overall insufficient to effectively mitigate such behaviour, which impacted voters' ability to make an informed choice, and affected public trust.

Campaign Finance

The legal framework does not regulate the financial aspects of the period between the first-round election day and the official start of the second-round campaign. The lack of campaign-related reporting requirements in this period impacts transparency and accountability. According to data from the Meta Ad Library, both candidates incurred online advertising expenses during this unregulated period.³⁰ By law, only second-round candidates were permitted to spend funds for campaign purposes,

²⁴ See also the [Guidelines](#) by the European Commission on DSA responsibilities of the VLOPs during elections, which state that VLOPs should combat disinformation, ensure the integrity of accounts and clearly identify AI generated content. The terms and conditions of [Meta](#) and [TikTok](#) include prohibitions on inauthentic accounts, disinformation, unlabelled AI-generated images and fake engagement.

²⁵ Since 5 May, Funky Citizens and Expert Forum separately flagged a total of more than 3,000 posts to the VLOPs.

²⁶ In the first-round, the Ministry of Internal Affairs flagged some 450 posts. The National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications (ANCOM) flagged 240 accounts in the first round, and more than 900 posts and accounts in the second round to VLOPs.

²⁷ For example, a well-known civic education site, *Politică La Minut*, had a post flagged for removal for being from a potentially inauthentic account by a 'political actor' and without labelling. However, Meta did not remove the post. Some CSOs [criticized](#) the CEB's decision making in respect to this and other cases.

²⁸ Meta [stated](#) that it disagreed with some of the CEB and court decisions, and refused to restrict some sanctioned content, while it "temporarily restricted access to the content in Romania that clearly met the Political Actor definition (such as politicians and political parties) for violating local law". The restricted content remained accessible from outside Romania.

²⁹ For example, see ANCOM's [announcement](#) of 9 May, which informed consumers where to access terms and conditions and the legal responsibilities of platforms, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs [statement](#) of 13 May about disinformation on the alleged assassination attempt of a political figure; and a [statement](#) from 16 May concerning 'doppelgänger' accounts. Also on 16 May, the PEA [refuted](#) "false information released in the public space by a political party regarding the fairness of the electoral process".

³⁰ Based on data from Meta Ad Library retrieved between May 5 and 8, Mr. Simion spent approximately RON 46.862 (around EUR 9.372) in advertising costs, while Mr. Dan spent approximately RON 2.107 (around EUR 421).

and only from the start of the official campaign period.³¹ The law sets contribution and expenditure limits at 50 per cent of the first-round ceiling, resulting in a combined permissible amount of RON 121.5 million (approximately EUR 24.3 million) for the two rounds.³² The significant increase in the overall ceiling appeared disproportionate to the official eight-day campaign period, particularly in light of the already high cap applied in the first round.

The PEA, in line with its first-round practice, continued to publish data from declared contributions and expenditures from contestants, contributing to transparency. As of 17 May, Mr. Dan had declared RON 60.9 million (EUR 12.1 million) in contributions, and RON 51.9 million (EUR 10.3 million) in expenditures, of which RON 40.4 million (EUR 8 million) and RON 31.5 million (EUR 6.3 million), respectively, were incurred in the second round. Mr. Simion did not submit any financial information related to the second round prior to election day and had previously reported RON 41.25 million (EUR 8.25 million) in contributions and RON 41.23 million (EUR 8.24 million) in expenditures.³³

Prior to the second round, the PEA did not conduct additional financial compliance checks. However, it informed the ODIHR LEOM that it has initiated sanctioning procedures against individuals in connection with third-party financing of online campaigning, based on information obtained through its ongoing cooperation with the police.³⁴

Media

A decision of the National Audiovisual Council (CNA) adopted in February stipulated that a ban on airing electoral broadcasts applies during the first-round silence period, until the close of polls.³⁵ However, on 6 May – two days after the end of the silence period – the CNA issued a press release effectively extending the silence period on campaign coverage to the five-day period preceding the official start of the second-round campaign. This interpretation was communicated late in the process and not supported by a formal decision, undermining legal foreseeability.³⁶ Moreover, notwithstanding the CNA's statement, most broadcasters continued to air electoral programmes during this interim period. Furthermore, these programmes were not identified or labelled as electoral material.³⁷

During the second-round campaign, legal provisions requiring fair, balanced, and impartial coverage, as well as equal and free airtime for presidential candidates, remained applicable. The CNA continued to consider complaints concerning campaign-related breaches during its regular sessions in a transparent manner. However, its decisions did not consistently provide for timely or effective redress, as some decisions were taken late and sanctions had a limited deterrent effect, impacting the effectiveness of the remedy.³⁸ The CNA did not conduct quantitative media monitoring. It issued one

³¹ Candidates who did not advance to the second round may settle only first-round campaign expenses, based on commitments made prior to election day, and must do so within 30 days following election day.

³² Of the first-round candidates, along with the two frontrunners, Mr. Antonescu and Mr. Ponta received more than three per cent of the valid votes and therefore qualified for reimbursement of their campaign expenses.

³³ Mr. Simion declared contributions of RON 26.9 million (EUR 5.3 million) as transfers from his political party and RON 14.3 million (EUR 2.8 million) as loans and own revenue.

³⁴ The PEA informed the ODIHR LEOM that it had not received a response to its request, submitted before the first round, for VLOPs, including Meta, to disclose who financed online advertisements removed at the CEB's request.

³⁵ In addition, the CNA [Decision 86/2025](#) set the permitted formats for campaign coverage as electoral promotion, electoral debate, or informative programmes, each of which was subject to distinct labelling requirements.

³⁶ The [press release](#) stated that the second-round campaign would start on 9 May, and it reiterated the requirement on public broadcasters to allocate free airtime and establish broadcasting schedules accordingly. It also confirmed applicability of the CNA [Decision 86/2025](#).

³⁷ For example, most television stations broadcast a debate between the two candidates held on 7 May during the congress of the National Trade Union Bloc; in addition, the first media-organized debate was broadcast by *Euronews România* on 8 May.

³⁸ For example, the CNA issued a warning to *România TV* only on 14 May in relation to breaches related to candidate coverage between 11 and 24 April.

sanction related to the second round, acting *ex officio*.³⁹ This, combined with an ineffective sanctioning mechanism, limited the CNA's ability to enforce legal requirements for campaign coverage effectively.

The ODIHR LEOM media monitoring showed that broadcasters continued to cover the campaign primarily in current affairs and talk shows.⁴⁰ Some broadcasters aired candidate interviews with prominent anchors marked as paid electoral promotion, parts of which were later rebroadcast unmarked in news segments, blurring the line between editorial and paid content.⁴¹ While several major broadcasters announced debates for the last week of the campaign, Mr. Simion declined to participate in all debates.⁴² The law does not require electoral programmes to be interpreted into sign language, and the debate on the Romanian Television (*TVR*) featuring only Mr. Dan was the only monitored broadcast that provided sign-language coverage.

In line with the law, the public *TVR1* covered candidates in news programmes in a fairly balanced manner and largely in a neutral tone, dedicating 42 per cent to Mr. Simion and 32 per cent to Mr. Dan.⁴³ Coverage by most private media outlets reflected political biases. *A3 CNN* dedicated 41 per cent of coverage to Mr. Simion, largely in a negative or neutral tone, and 43 per cent to Mr. Dan, in a neutral or positive tone. *Digi24* allocated 59 per cent of its coverage to Mr. Simion, largely in a negative tone, and 26 per cent to Mr. Dan, in a neutral tone. *România TV* dedicated most of its coverage to Mr. Dan (44 per cent), in a neutral and positive tone, and provided Mr. Simion with 25 per cent, in a neutral tone. This broadcaster also dedicated significant time to the 2024 presidential candidate Călin Georgescu (10 per cent), largely in a neutral tone. *Realitatea Plus TV* portrayed Mr. Dan (38 per cent) mostly negatively; Mr. Simion received 29 per cent, mostly neutral and positive coverage; and Mr. Georgescu 18 per cent of coverage in a neutral or positive tone. *ProTV* covered the candidates only in its news programmes. Overall, as in the first round, the lack of clear distinction between coverage formats, limited campaign coverage in news programmes, and the lack of meaningful political discourse affected voters' ability to make an informed choice.

Election Dispute Resolution

One complaint, filed with the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) by a presidential candidate on 6 May, challenged the validity of the first-round results and sought their annulment.⁴⁴ The complaint cited violations of democratic principles and the right to equal opportunities, and alleged that both candidates advancing to the second round had used unlawful means during the campaign.⁴⁵ On 9 May,

³⁹ On 16 May, the CNA sanctioned *Realitatea Plus TV* with a fine of RON 10,000 for a lack of impartiality and broadcasting unverified information on 14 May.

⁴⁰ The ODIHR LEOM resumed a quantitative and qualitative media monitoring of the primetime (18:00-24:00) programmes of six national TV channels (*TVR1*, *ProTV*, *România TV*, *Realitatea Plus TV*, *Antena 3 CNN* and *DIGI24*), from 9 to 18 May 2025.

⁴¹ See the Council of Europe [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2007\)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns, which](#) states that “[r]egular presenters of news and current affairs programmes should not take part in paid political advertising”.

⁴² During discussions on the organization of the *Digi24* debate, on 12 May, Mr. Simion verbally attacked the channel's journalists, recorded the exchange without their knowledge, and subsequently broadcast it on social networks as electoral advertising. The CNA condemned this action in a [press release](#). One day after this incident, Mr. Simion verbally attacked [Hotnews](#). On 15 May, AUR's vice-president [called](#) media “organized crime”. The same day, the CNA's vice-president [condemned](#) these attacks in an interview.

⁴³ Moreover, Mr. Dan was more visible on *TVR*, as Mr. Simion did not participate in the debate on this channel.

⁴⁴ See the [challenge](#) submitted by Sebastian Popescu (New Romanian Party, PNR) to the CCR. Mr. Popescu informed the ODIHR LEOM that he received no correspondence from the CCR regarding his application, including no acknowledgement of receipt or notification on the ruling.

⁴⁵ Election results can be challenged by candidates, parties, coalitions, and national minority organizations within three days of election day. The law provides that the CCR may annul the results and order a repeat of the first round if it finds that voting, counting, or tabulation were conducted in a manner that altered the order of candidates qualifying for the run-off. The CCR must validate the election results within 24 hours of receiving them from the CEB and rule on any submitted challenges within that timeframe.

one day after the legal deadline, the CCR dismissed the complaint as unfounded, and confirmed the results of the first round.⁴⁶ Although by law, CCR sessions are public unless otherwise decided for justified reasons, the session on the validation of the results was closed to the public and observers without any justification, limiting transparency.

Between the two rounds, the CEB published 37 decisions on complaints submitted after the first election day, including some related to activities during the first round. The CEB partially admitted 10 complaints, rejected 27, and forwarded 8 to the police for further investigation. In addition, it published some 3,900 decisions on complaints concerning online content. Lower-level electoral bureaus published decisions on 148 complaints, mainly related to appointments of EBs, campaign violations, and breaches of personal data protection regulations. The Bucharest Court of Appeal (BCoA) ruled on 51 complaints against CEB decisions, primarily related to online content, and rejected all of them. In 15 cases, plaintiffs requested the BCoA to seek an advisory opinion from the Court of Justice of the European Union regarding the definition of ‘political actor’ and its interpretation under the EU Regulation 2024/900, citing the novelty of the provision and the resulting legal uncertainty; all such requests were dismissed by the BCoA. Twenty-four BCoA rulings were further challenged at the High Court of Cassation and Justice, which partially upheld one, fully upheld two, and rejected all other appeals.⁴⁷

Similar to the first round, electoral disputes were generally handled efficiently and within the prescribed deadlines. However, transparency remained limited, as most complaints were adjudicated by electoral bureaus in closed sessions. Moreover, in some cases, the BCoA allowed very limited time for the submission of defences and responses, and issued rulings almost immediately after the hearings. In several instances observed by ODIHR LEOM, the court granted parties 30 minutes to one hour to submit responses before continuing the hearing, and in some cases issued rulings within 30 minutes of the hearing’s conclusion. Combined with concerns raised by several stakeholders that the timeframe for resolving disputes related to online content was too short to allow for the adequate presentation of legal arguments, this has raised concerns about the quality of due process, which is at odds with OSCE commitments.⁴⁸

Election Day

In line with its methodology for limited election observation missions, the IEOM did not conduct a comprehensive assessment of election day proceedings, but observed the opening, voting, and counting in a limited number of polling stations across the country. In and around those polling stations, the atmosphere was generally peaceful and orderly. Despite the legal prohibition on campaigning during the silence period, including online, several political figures and influencers continued to disseminate

⁴⁶ The CEB issued a press release on 6 May announcing the first-round results. The CEB submitted the results, together with the respective protocols, to the CCR on 7 May. Consequently, by law, the CCR was required to validate the results and rule on any complaints by 24:00 on 8 May.

⁴⁷ On 13 May, Meta appealed the BCoA’s decision to dismiss its complaint concerning the CEB’s removal of online content, as well as its request for a referral to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) for an advisory opinion on the definition of ‘political actor’ under EU Regulation 2024/900. The High Court upheld Meta’s appeal on substantive grounds but declined to refer the matter to the CJEU.

⁴⁸ Paragraph 13.9 of the 1986 OSCE [Vienna Document](#) tasks OSCE participating States to effectively apply remedies, including “the right to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time before an independent and impartial tribunal, including the right to present legal arguments”.

political messages.⁴⁹ The CNA sanctioned two broadcasters for violating the silence period.⁵⁰ State authorities informed the public about continued efforts to address disinformation campaigns on social networks on election day.⁵¹

The limited number of polling stations visited by the IEOM opened on time, and the process was generally assessed as smooth and well-organized. Polling Station Electoral Bureau (EB) members appeared well prepared, with most benefiting from their previous experience, including in the first round. Procedures were largely followed, and all essential materials were in place. The voting process was evaluated positively, with observers finding the process to be conducted in an efficient, transparent, and professional manner. IEOM observers noted some procedural shortcomings, including instances where vote secrecy was compromised due to the positioning of voting booths, the inadequate quality of the ballot paper, or the manner in which ballots were inserted into the ballot box. Some procedures, including the sealing of ballot boxes and the order of voter identification steps, were sometimes applied inconsistently across polling stations.

The presence of citizen observers, primarily from *VotCorect* and *Funky Citizens*, along with candidate and party representatives in some instances, contributed to the transparency of the process. However, IEOM observers also noted the presence of some persons accredited as citizen observers, who claimed affiliation with one candidate. Instances of unauthorized individuals inside polling stations were also noted, including police officers present without invitation from the chairperson, who at times acted as queue controllers or checked observers' accreditations on their own initiative instead of EB members, challenging legal provisions. In some rural areas, local officials such as mayors were also observed in polling stations. Since polling locations remained unchanged from the first round, accessibility remained a serious concern, where many polling stations lacked independent access for voters with disabilities.

The day before election day, the CEB issued a circular for CoEBs, reiterating provisions on closing and counting procedures.⁵² In the polling stations where the IEOM observed counting, the process was swift and generally efficient, although occasionally rushed, leading to inconsistent adherence to certain procedures, such as the counting of unused ballots or signatures on voter lists. In some cases, IEOM observers had a limited view of the counting process. The completion of results protocols was generally done in line with established procedures. At the CoEB level, intake and tabulation of results protocols were efficient, but transparency was sometimes limited, as IEOM observers did not always have full access to the data entry process, and citizen observers and party proxies, by law, are not specifically entitled to observe this process.

⁴⁹ On election day, the ODIHR IEOM observed continued social media activity by the two candidates and other senior politicians, including government officials, promoting narratives aligned with their campaign messages and encouraging voter participation. The CNA issued a [press release](#) reiterating that broadcasters are prohibited from airing electoral content during the silence period, and warned that it was monitoring compliance “in real time”. CEB decisions led to the removal of social network posts from both candidates, citing violations of campaign silence provisions.

⁵⁰ The CNA sanctioned *Realitatea Plus ex officio* with a fine of RON 10,000 for breaching campaign silence by broadcasting images of Mr. Simion at a church, and issued a warning to A3 CNN for airing a statement by Mr. Dan.

⁵¹ The Ministry of Internal Affairs [announced](#) that it identified and ordered the removal of over 160 TikTok accounts misrepresenting the Romanian Police and other official bodies. The PEA and the Ministry of Internal Affairs [rejected](#) allegations about inaccuracies in the voter register. The Ministry of Defence [rejected](#) claims that foreign military personnel would be deployed in Romanian law enforcement uniforms on election day. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs [referred](#) to what it described as a coordinated campaign seeking to undermine confidence in the electoral process and denied allegations regarding irregularities in out-of-country voting.

⁵² The [circular](#), issued on 17 May, reiterated procedures for counting and completing the results protocol, specifying that any recount request must be submitted in writing by an EB member before the protocol is finalized, and emphasized that such requests and related complaints must be decided by majority vote.

On election day, the CEB considered and published three decisions on complaints against the replacement of EB members, as well as 149 complaints related to online content. In addition, the ODIHR LEOM received limited information throughout the day on 26 complaints submitted by voters and citizen observer groups to electoral bureaus. These concerned alleged violations of voting procedures, instances of multiple voting, the widespread posting on social networks of photographs of marked ballots by voters, the publication of exit poll results before the end of voting, and continued campaigning. Information on these cases was not consistently made available on the websites of the respective electoral bureaus, limiting transparency. In addition, the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported 244 election-related violations.⁵³

Following the close of polls, turnout figures and preliminary results were published online in real time in multiple user-friendly formats. By the morning of 19 May, 100 per cent of the results protocols were processed, indicating the victory of Mr. Dan with 53.6 per cent of the vote cast. Voter turnout was reported at 64.72 per cent, representing an 11.5 per cent rise from the first round.

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

⁵³ In most cases, these concerned breaches of campaign silence, photographing of ballots, and minor public order offences. The police also reported 76 possible election-related incidents prior to election day and during the night before, over half of which involved continued campaigning.

MISSION INFORMATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bucharest, 19 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 handling of possible post-election day complaints or appeals and the announcement of results. 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 12 experts in the capital and 22 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. On election day, 44 observers from 19 countries were deployed, including a 7-member delegation from the OSCE PA. Opening was observed in 11 polling stations and voting was observed in 136 polling stations across the country. Counting was observed in 12 polling stations, and the tabulation in 11 CoEBs.

The IEOM wishes to thank the authorities for their invitation to observe the elections, and the Permanent Electoral Authority, 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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