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Parliamentary elections in Romania: Majority urgently needed

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Just one week after the far-right Călin Georgescu unexpectedly came first in the first round of the Romanian presidential election, Romania's parliamentary elections took place on December 1, 2024. The result is a parliament full of medium-sized and small parties that will be very difficult to bind into a halfway stable government coalition. Since the appointment of the prime minister and the government is the task of the president, political attention is now turning again to the outcome of the presidential election, which is scheduled to take place on December 8.

A look at the numbers

The parliamentary elections in Romania on Sunday, December 1, 2024, brought the following preliminary results for the **Chamber of Deputies**:

PSD (Partidul Social Democrat, PSD, Social Democratic Party): **21,97%**

AUR (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor, AUR, Alliance for the Unity of Romanians): **18,02%**

PNL (Partidul Național Liberal, PNL, National Liberal Party): **13,20%**

USR (Uniunea Salvați România, USR, Union for the Salvation of Romania): **12,41%**

S.O.S România (SOS Romania): **7,36%**

POT (Partidul Oamenilor Tineri, German Party of Young People): **6,46%**

UDMR (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România, UDMR, Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania): **6,34%**

The provisional results for the **Senate** are as follows:

PSD (Partidul Social Democrat, PSD, German Social Democratic Party): **22,31%**

AUR (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor, AUR, German Alliance for the Unity of Romanians): **18,31%**

PNL Partidul Național Liberal, PNL, German National Liberal Party): **14,29%**

USR (Uniunea Salvați România, USR, German Union for the Salvation of Romania): **12,26%**

S.O.S România (German SOS Romania): **7,76%**

POT (Partidul Oamenilor Tineri, German Party of Young People): **6.40%**

UDMR (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România, UDMR, German Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania): **6,38%**

The turnout was 52.50%, significantly higher than in 2020, when only 30.29% of eligible voters took part in the parliamentary election.

A look at the results

The parliamentary election was preceded by a week of great political unrest after the right-wing extremist candidate Calin Georgescu, who represents pro-Russian, anti-European and anti-NATO positions, unexpectedly came first in the runoff election in the first round of the presidential election. The actual favorite, the social democratic Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu (PSD), did not even make it to the runoff election. He subsequently resigned as party leader of the PSD. The leader of the second party in the government coalition, the national liberal Nicolae Ciucă (PNL), also resigned because of his poor performance in the presidential election. While the PNL was able to quickly and convincingly resolve the leadership question with the high-profile politician Ilie Bolojan, struggles over direction broke out within the PSD.

At first glance, it seems surprising that the PSD received the most votes in the parliamentary election just one week later, with around 22%, after the unexpectedly poor performance of its candidate in the presidential election. However, it should be noted that the PSD, which has been "wedged" at the center of state power for years, has lost a lot of support compared to the around 29% in 2020 and 45% in 2016. And this despite the fact that the PSD leadership once again mobilized the entire party base through its strong local structures. The PSD's election result is therefore interpreted by many observers in Romania as meaning that 78% of Romanian voters voted against the clientelistic old state party. Against corruption, nepotism and against an arrogance that sees voters primarily as a mass to be manipulated in order to maintain power.

Romania's current political problem is that the vast majority of voters who are rebelling against the PSD system are split into two large camps: first, a nationalist, sovereigntist camp that is critical of Europe and works with pro-Russian narratives, which includes the AUR, S.O.S România and POT parties. This camp receives just over 30% of the vote. And then, second, a pro-European, pro-NATO camp that follows liberal or liberal-conservative ideas. With the PNL, USR and UDMR parties, this camp also receives around 30% of the vote. Both camps want to end the PSD system but cannot work together due to their completely contradictory fundamental political beliefs. Ironically, each camp would now need the PSD to form a majority.

The forces around the resigned PSD chairman Marcel Ciolacu and his initially designated successor, the European parliamentarian Victor Negrescu, tend towards inner-party reform and the pro-European, pro-NATO camp. However, the PSD's electoral base and numerous other powerful actors within the party share the nationalist, sovereigntist and Eurosceptic attitudes of the other political camp. Which side the PSD voters take will decide who will be the next president of Romania. Which side the PSD leadership takes will decide what the next government in Romania will look like. One thing is certain, however: it will be a highly fragile government.

What's next in Romania

The Romanian President appoints a candidate for the office of Prime Minister to form a government and then appoints the candidate based on a vote of confidence in Parliament. Whether the right-wing extremist Calin Georgescu or the liberal Elena Lasconi becomes President of Romania on December 8 will not only have an impact on the country's foreign, security and European policy, but also on the process of forming a government. Romania is currently in a political crisis in which the country and its institutions are only moving forward step by step and tentatively.

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