

Romania's political crisis reflects severe tensions within the country's Social Democratic Party

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/06/19/romania-political-crisis-tensions-psd/

2017-6-19

Only six months after winning parliamentary elections, Romania's Social Democratic Party is in turmoil following an attempt by the party's leader, Liviu Dragnea, to remove the current Prime Minister, Sorin Grindeanu. With the party set for a key parliamentary vote on whether to keep the Prime Minister in power, [Mihnea Stoica](#) suggests that both Grindeanu and Dragnea's political futures are now in the balance.



Romania's Social Democrats won the country's [parliamentary elections](#) in December last year. But their first six months in power have turned out to be an extremely bumpy ride. The latest drama has seen the party enter a spiral of crises following a failed attempt by their leader, Liviu Dragnea, to sack Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu, who was until recently perceived to be something of a political puppet for Dragnea.

The situation came as a surprise, especially after the cabinet managed to survive [protests in February](#), when hundreds of thousands of Romanians hit the streets as a reaction to the government's attempt – allegedly under Dragnea's influence – to decriminalise certain corruption offences. The crisis is even more surprising given the government has actually experienced [solid economic results](#) in recent months. But the relationship between the leader of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the new Prime Minister – who has refused to obey party orders – has nevertheless deteriorated rapidly. Indeed, events unfolded at a staggering speed in just a little over two days.

The surprise decision of the PSD's leadership to try to remove Grindeanu came less than a month after Dragnea publicly declared that [he was satisfied](#) with how the government was working. When the Prime Minister refused to leave office, he was ousted from the PSD outright and his cabinet members were asked by Dragnea to submit their resignations. However, despite facing immense pressure and a hostile leadership within his own party, Grindeanu is now seeking to form a new cabinet, having the support of several vocal Social Democrats who have repeatedly spoken against Dragnea's allegedly authoritarian rule.

These supporters include MEP Cătălin Ivan, and Mihai Chirica, Mayor of Iași (one of the biggest municipalities in Romania), as well as former minister and MP Aurelia Cristea, all of whom were isolated by Dragnea over their critical stances against his leadership style. But there seem to be many more who until now have kept their silence, but who could, at any point, manifest their disapproval with their leader. The fate of the government will remain uncertain until the clash between these divergent views within the PSD settles. [Two distinct shades of red](#) within the party have now come to the surface.



No longer perceived as Dragnea's puppet: PM Sorin Grindeanu. Credits: [AGERPRES](#) (CC BY 3.0)

Mathematical nonsense and a mathematical error

The [evaluation](#) produced by Liviu Dragnea and his close collaborators (on the basis of which he considered the

government should resign) was nothing short of an absurdity, as the document was a simplistic mathematical representation of the number of decisions taken by the government throughout its first six months. The numbers were compared with the entire number of decisions that the government was expected to take during its entire four years in power, which naturally showed that only some of what was expected had been implemented so far.

The Prime Minister, who added that given Dragnea's substantial contribution in establishing the portfolios in the cabinet he should also [assume part of the guilt](#) in not having the party manifesto properly implemented, criticised the document and declared he would not resign on the basis of such an ill-founded paper. He was backed by former Prime Minister Victor Ponta, a staunch opponent of Dragnea.

Moreover, Ponta pledged his [full support](#) for Grindeanu, promising that he would devote time and effort to pursuing MPs who remained faithful to him to support the Prime Minister, who was now left without a cabinet. But Dragnea fought back and the PSD leadership will now ask for a no confidence vote in the Parliament. Romanian politics is experiencing a novel situation, as a party is preparing to vote against its own government and asks the opposition to do the same.

But yet again, simply adding up numbers might produce a distorted image. Although theoretically the PSD and its junior coalition partner would have enough votes to topple the government, the situation is more complicated, precisely because it is still unclear if Dragnea can rely on the votes of all Social Democrat MPs. A number of them are unhappy with the fact that key positions are held by those who not long ago came from outside the party, i.e. mostly from the Greater Romania Party (PRM).

Even Dragnea has been reminded that he was initially a [member of a competitor party](#) (the PD) before joining the PSD. If Grindeanu manages to pull enough support from those who are uneasy with Dragnea as party leader, he might just manage to survive. It would be a disastrous scenario for the current leadership of the PSD, which would then almost surely find itself in a situation of calling for a congress within the party, which would open up competition for the leadership. Being in a weakened position, this might represent the beginning of the end for Dragnea's political career.

Ultimately, the crisis will only end once things settle within the PSD, one way or another. Should the government fall following the vote in parliament, Dragnea will cleanse the party of all those who spoke against him and will form a genuine 'puppet cabinet' which he will scrutinise even more closely than he did with the current one. But if the government survives the no confidence vote, the situation will linger until the victors remove Dragnea and his team from their positions. Regardless of how events unfold, both the government and the PSD will be fragile until a new leadership, with or without current key figures, regains full legitimacy through a proper congress.

[Please read our comments policy before commenting.](#)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.



Not getting along: Liviu Dragnea (left) and Victor Ponta. Credits: PSD (CC BY 2.0)

About the author

Mihnea Stoica – *Babes-Bolyai University*

Mihnea Stoica is a Research Assistant at the Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. He holds an MSc in Comparative European Politics from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and has worked as an MEP adviser at the European Parliament. His research interests revolve around political communication, focusing mainly on populism, Euroscepticism and the far-right.



-