

Defending democracy and Romania's European path against extremism

In the context of Romania's electoral climate, a wave of shocking and scientifically unfounded statements has emerged, questioning Romania's membership in the EU and other intergovernmental alliances, fueling hatred and stereotypes against certain minority communities, glorifying the totalitarian movements in the country's history, denying the existence of the war in Ukraine and the Ukrainian state itself and sparking outrage among civil society while also creating deep polarization among citizens.

The European Students' Union (ESU), the organisation representing 20 million students at European level and the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR), as the legitimate representative of all students in Romania, firmly condemn any action that undermines the democratic values shaped by Romania in its 35 years of freedom. We emphasize the critical need to safeguard these values, maintain the country's European path and address the alarming threats posed by extremist movements in the public sphere to the rule of law, scientific research, academic activity, fundamental rights and citizens' liberties.

The results of the first round of the presidential elections have reflected the public's justified dissatisfaction with how Romania has been governed over the years, as expressed through voting choices. However, it is crucial to understand that radicalization, populism, extremist ideologies, hate speech targeting minority communities, the abandonment of European values and threats to fundamental human rights are not solutions for advancing Romania's development.

Romania's current political landscape sends a clear and urgent warning that cannot be ignored by political actors. We call on political leaders and parties to prioritize the needs of citizens, move beyond superficial declarations to take concrete, impactful actions and reevaluate their political and governance agendas. If these systemic issues are not addressed with the utmost seriousness, the growing influence of extremist ideologies will continue to pose a significant threat to Romania's democracy.

At this critical time, it is essential for citizens to stay united and well-informed. We stress the importance of critically analyzing and verifying information to ensure that the votes cast in the upcoming two weeks—during both the Parliamentary and second round of the presidential elections—are not influenced by misinformation or manipulation.

As the representatives of students at both national and European levels, we strongly condemn any public statements that undermine the validity of scientific research or promote ignorance, hate or undemocratic values. We

urge all higher education institutions to take a firm stance against such actions, which threaten to erode the credibility of the academic community and its vital role in society.

We call on all students, political leaders, civil society actors and higher education institutions to stand firm against these threats, to reaffirm their commitment to democratic values and to reject the glorification of totalitarianism and the promotion of ignorance.

Now, more than ever, Romania must:

- be resilient against disinformation and the extremist rhetoric
- work to bridge the divisions that threaten to tear its society apart
- stand firmly with the European Union and Ukraine