
ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT BLOCKS MP'S PROSECUTION

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Romania's parliament on Wednesday rejected prosecutors' requests to allow the arrest of Sebastian Ghita, a wealthy businessman and lawmaker who has been indicted for creating an informal network of power that was used to "determine the appointment of several persons in important positions.

A total of 176 MPs rejected the request, while 107 MPs backed it.

Parliament is dominated by the centre-left coalition led by the Social Democratic Party, PSD, so Wednesday's vote to block the prosecution was unsurprising as Ghita was a PSD member before he resigned from the party after the investigation against him started.

"In the party, we have a political agreement that any prosecution request should be approved - but we can't make our MPs vote against their beliefs, PSD leader Liviu Dragnea said just before the vote.

Prosecutors allege that Ghita set up a crime system, using his powers as a quid pro quo to involve public servants in a crime mechanism, which implied serving his illegal interests.

Ghita, 38, is a close aide to former Prime Minister Victor Ponta, who is also under a corruption probe.

Ghita is also being investigated in two other cases. Last June, prosecutors accused him of influence peddling, tax evasion, money laundering, complicity with embezzlement of EU funds and bribing voters.

In February, he was also investigated for embezzling European funds. The case also involves Iulian Hertanu, the brother-in-law to Ponta.

Ghita has denied all charges and has accused prosecutors of abuse.

Romania is still considered one of the most corrupt states in the European Union, which it joined in 2007.

However, under pressure from the EU, the courts have upped the fight against corruption in recent

years. One former prime minister and nine other nine former ministers were jailed in the last couple of years.

Marian Chiriac Bucharest

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