
EU WELCOMES ROMANIA'S REPEAL OF GRAFT DECREE, OFFERS HELP FOR JAILS

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17.02.2017

EurActiv (17 February 2017)

The European Commission yesterday (16 February) welcomed as a very good step the decision of the Romanian government to repeal a decree that would have decriminalised graft, and offered Bucharest assistance and funds to improve the countrys prisons.

The one-month-old cabinet of Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu enraged voters when it quietly approved an emergency decree two weeks ago that would have decriminalised several corruption offences, prompting the largest display of popular anger since the fall of communism in 1989.

After the protests, the decree was repealed and its main architect, Justice Minister Florin Iordache, resigned.

The decree, which sparked concern in Brussels and Washington, would have made abuse of power a crime punishable by jail only if the sums involved exceeded 200,000 lei (€44,000).

I really welcome the fact that the emergency order has been repealed. It is a very good step, European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans told a news conference in Brussels after a meeting Grindeanu.

Timmermans, who had warned Romania not to backtrack in the fight against corruption after the graft decree was approved, urged the country to continue tackling graft and to involve civil society in the reform of its corruption laws.

He also offered Romania EU assistance to improve the prison system, saying EU funds could be used for that purpose. The Social Democrat-led government had argued that the decriminalisation of some graft offences would have reduced overcrowding in the countrys jails.

Speaking at the same news conference, Grindeanu committed to new reforms and said he will work to make sure the EUs monitoring of Romanias judicial sector and anti-graft legislation would no longer be needed by 2019, when the country takes over the EU presidency for the first time since it joined the bloc in 2007.

Since Romania joined the EU, Brussels has subjected Bucharest to a Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) review over corruption concerns.

I strongly believe if that we stick to that roadmap we will be where we want to be: that the fight (against corruption) is so successful that the situation is irreversible, Timmermans said, when asked about the review.

Grindeanu also said he will next week propose a new justice minister, who is likely to be picked from outside the political sphere, he told journalists.

By [EurActiv.com with Reuters and AFP](#)

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