
EX-PRESIDENT'S DAMNING INTERVIEW CAUSES STORM IN ROMANIA

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Former Romanian president Ion Iliescu's interview with French newspaper Le Figaro has sparked controversy in Bucharest, after he criticized the ruling party, which he once led, and then tried to retract the statements - prompting the newspaper to release the recording to the media.

Le Figaro initially published excerpts of the interview in a longer story on Monday, where Iliescu debunked some of the Social Democratic Party's favourite narratives and accused the current party leader, Liviu Dragnea, of causing fractures in the party.

The former Social Democratic, PSD, leader said the party currently has no candidate for the presidential elections next year and that the best choice would be for them to support Calin Popescu Tariceanu, leader of their junior ally, the Alliance of the Liberals and Democrats, ALDE.

We do not have a personality in the PSD to get the support of the people. Not enough, unfortunately, Iliescu said.

Iliescu also said the party was going through a serious crisis due to Dragnea's corruption sentences.

However, following his criticism of the current leadership of the ruling party, Iliescu wrote on his blog on Tuesday that he had never made the statements.

The journalists who interviewed him on November 7 then released the recording of the interview, which was broadcast on Tuesday night on Realitatea TV news channel.

Iliescu had dismissed one of the main narratives of the Social Democrats who have blamed a deep state - a pact between the intelligence services and the justice system □ for the corruption accusations made against senior politicians in the party, including the leader, Dragnea.

It [the 'deep state'] does not exist, the former president said.

This is exactly what he said, Thierry Portes, Le Figaro's international desk editor, told Romanian news channel Digi24.

It is obvious that the party is going through a crisis, and his statements were not even that surprising. Of course he spoke about a serious crisis due to Dragnea's justice problems, he pointed out.

Romania has experienced turmoil during the past two years since the Social Democrats won the

elections in December 2016.

A push by the ruling party to change justice legislation and the criminal codes to decriminalize graft-related offences and curb prosecutors' independence has led to mass protests.

Dragnea was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in jail in July a second corruption case. He is currently appealing the sentence.

A former Communist Party member and educated in Moscow, Iliescu, now 88, served as president of Romania from 1989 until 1996 and from 2000 to 2004.

From 1996 until 2000 and from 2004 until his retirement in 2008 he was also a senator for the Social Democratic Party. In 2017, he was indicted for crimes against humanity for his alleged role in the 1989 anti-communist revolution.

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