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**OPINION: ROMANIA'S FARCICAL INCOMPETENCE UNLIKELY TO IMPACT EU**

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Romania has taken over the presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first half of 2019. Despite the ruling party's incompetence and anti-EU rhetoric, Bucharest cannot do much harm, says Robert Schwartz.

The Romanian government [ ] the wise leadership of the as yet still self-proclaimed social democratic PSD [ ] taken control of Brussels and Strasbourg, its chest swelling with pride. That narrative, or a variation thereof, will likely splash across the front pages of the administration's own media outlets. And it is no doubt how a number of ministers in Prime Minister Viorica Dancila's orbit hope to go down in history.

### **A threat, or a joke?**

Thus far, the obedient party matron Dancila has carried out the instructions given by her powerful puppet master, Liviu Dragnea, without batting an eyelash [ ] nationalist and anti-EU rhetoric all the while. She and her team will show those immoral snobs across the rest of Europe how one conducts politics for Romanians in Romania [ ] least that's what supporters think. They will read them the riot act: All those snobs who can't speak Romanian, making them the butt of jokes in the press; who can only speak foreign languages on paper; who mix up the Montenegrin capital Podgorica with Pristina on live TV. Yes, she's going to give it to Merkel, Macron, Kurz and the rest of those what's their names [ ] she forgets the names of her European partners. At least that is what Dancila has trumpeted in Bucharest. And to give her self-confidence a boost before embarking on the attack, the Russian propaganda portal Sputnik recently named her "Romanian Politician of the Year." Shame on anyone who would think ill of the distinction.

Yet, despite all that, Dragnea, Dancila & Co. are not capable of doing lasting damage to the EU. The most important decisions of the first half of the year will be beyond Romania's purview. Brexit and European elections were bundled up long ago and will not, indeed cannot, be influenced by Romania's turn at the helm. And should the administration show itself to be unrepentantly anti-European, President Klaus Iohannes can always come in and take the rudder. He has successfully done it many times before and he will certainly do it again [ ] if Dragnea makes good on his threat to put him on trial for treason as a result.

In terms of domestic policy, one can remain curious as to how the power struggle between the previously convicted PSD boss and parliamentary leader Dragnea and President Iohannes will play

out. A peaceful power-sharing agreement – a "cohabitation" a la francaise – is not an option, and an end to Romania's political instability is nowhere in sight.

### **Calm seas in Brussels**

And what will Romania's presidency mean for Brussels? Politicians in the European capital are calm. They are convinced that the administration in Bucharest is far too preoccupied with itself to start breaking fine European porcelain, let alone get something constructive done.

Before the Romanian crisis of 2019 gets underway, the fading Juncker Commission can quietly start packing its things and even attend a "historic" EU summit in romantic Transylvania – in the heart of Romania. The hometown of Romanian President Klaus Iohannes and the 2007 "European Capital of Culture," Sibiu will again hit the headlines in 2019, with a media offensive seeking to aim Europe's focus on the picturesque town. Dragnea, Dancila & Co. will be extras who will have to take solace in the fact that they were awarded consolation prizes by Sputnik and consortium. Thanks be to Europe.

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