
FRONT-RUNNER FOR EU PROSECUTOR'S POST FACES INVESTIGATIVE HEARING AT HOME IN ROMANIA

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Romania's former chief anticorruption prosecutor has said a widely criticized Romanian agency tasked with investigating magistrates is attempting to harm her bid to become the European Union's public prosecutor.

Laura Codruta Koevesi headed Romania's National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) for five years until last year, when she was dismissed by the leftist government. She has challenged her dismissal in the European Court of Human Rights.

During Koevesi's tenure, DNA's conviction rates for high-level graft jumped across the political spectrum, drawing EU praise. She has now emerged as the front-runner for the newly established job of EU public prosecutor. The new EU agency will tackle financial fraud across the European Union.

But on February 12, just days after it was revealed that Koevesi was the leading contender for the post, the Section for the Investigation of Criminal Offenses, an investigative agency within the judiciary, subpoenaed her for hearings on February 15 as a suspect in a corruption case.

Koevesi was scheduled on February 15 to fly to Brussels, where she has an interview with the selection panel for the EU public prosecutor's post on February 26. The EU is expected to approve a candidate for the new post at the beginning of next month.

The investigative agency, which was created among a raft of legislative and personnel changes made by the ruling Social Democrats in the past two years, on February 14 denied that the February 15 subpoena for Koevesi was meant to prevent her from flying to Brussels for her EU job interview.

However, "I think [the summons] is a sort of revenge for the complaint I made at the European Court of Human Rights," Koevesi told television station Digi24 late on February 13. "The second reason is clearly an attempt to stop my candidacy for EU prosecutor."

The DNA's success has been regularly praised by EU institutions, while the government has come under steady criticism from Brussels over proposed judicial reforms that could weaken the independence of the justice system.

The European Commission and the U.S. Embassy to Bucharest have warned the investigative

agency in Bucharest that its actions were being monitored.

"The [European] Commission is following the latest developments very closely. It is crucial that all candidates put forward by an independent selection panel are treated fairly," a spokesman told reporters in Brussels.

"We have confidence in Laura Codruta Koevesi's professional experience and we are supporting her efforts to seek professional opportunities within the international community," the embassy said in a statement for Romania's G4media.ro news site. "It is extremely disappointing for us to see yet another apparent attempt to discredit her. We wish her luck."

During Koevesi's time as head of the DNA, hundreds of dignitaries, elected officials, and business people were sent to prison after being convicted of corruption.

The governing coalition as well as influential business people and former politicians, some of whom went to prison for corruption, say the DNA colluded with parts of the justice system and the intelligence services, acting as a shadowy deep state.

However, Koevesi remains popular among a majority of Romanians, who see her as a symbol of the anticorruption fight. A rally in her support was announced for February 15 outside the government headquarters in Bucharest, the scene of huge anticorruption protests in 2017 and 2018.

Liviu Dragnea, the head of the ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD) and speaker of the lower house of parliament, has been convicted of abuse of power with the help of the DNA and has a second pending sentence for corruption.

The Romanian government, which took over the EU's rotating presidency for the first time last month, has made clear its opposition to Koevesi taking the job in Brussels.

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