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## ROMANIA EXTENDS VOTING RIGHTS FOR CITIZENS LIVING ABROAD

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Romanian President Klaus Iohannis on Tuesday promulgated a new law making it easier to vote abroad, saying it would give Romanians abroad the right to vote and not wait for hours in queues and fearing that they will not be able to vote before the ballot boxes close.

The problems facing voters in the diaspora are a major political issue in Romania. According to a July 17 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD, the Romanian diaspora is the fifth largest in the world, with 3.6 million Romanians living outside the country and about 19.5 million living in it.

But the report noted that about a quarter of all Romanians still in Romania have expressed a desire to go abroad as well, if they have the opportunity – one of the highest percentages in the region.

Iohannis said new law would allow early voting and voting by correspondence, and represents the first step to creating the conditions for the exercise of this right by all citizens who are [now] standing in queues outside polling stations even after 9pm.

Thousands of Romanian citizens complained of being denied the right to vote at polling stations organized outside the country in the European Parliament elections on May 26.

The complaints rekindled a debate about the need to create a proper environment and a legal framework for Romanians outside the country to express their wishes democratically.

Under the new law, Romanians abroad can vote over three days instead of one. And any citizens still waiting in line, or in front of the polling station at 9pm, when polling stations close, will be able to cast their vote even after the deadline.

The President urged the government, especially the Interior Ministry, Foreign Ministry, the Permanent Electoral Authority and the Ministry for Romanians Abroad, to show maximum responsibility for implementing the new law and the proper organization of the vote.

Romania will hold presidential elections in November 2019, when Iohannis will run for a second term for the National Liberal Party. He has criticized the ruling Social Democrat-ALDE coalition for allegedly obstructing the right to vote in the diaspora since it took power in 2016.

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