

Romanian president faces impeachment

Romania's President Traian Basescu faces a national referendum on his impeachment – part of a power grab by Prime Minister Victor Ponta that threatens democracy and the rule of law in the European Union state



Traian Basescu, 60

Former oil tanker captain – notorious for his salty language – elected president in 2004. Basescu steers former-Communist dictatorship into European Union in 2007. Romania has

fastest economic growth rate in EU until housing and credit bubble bursts in 2008

Recession: Re-elected in 2009, Basescu secures €20 billion IMF-led rescue package. Popularity declines steeply as austerity measures – including slashing public wages by 25%, pensions by 15%, and raising sales tax from 19% to 24% – lead to mass protests



Victor Ponta, 39

Becomes prime minister on May 7 – without election – when centre-right, Liberal Democrat government collapses

Power struggle

In two months Ponta issues 40 emergency

decrees, replacing speakers of both houses of parliament, ombudsman, and other top officials with left-wing Social Liberal Union (USL) loyalists, undermines Constitutional Court and attempts to replace head of state



Jul 4: Ruling USL passes decree to limit powers of

Constitutional Court, ending court's authority to rule on legitimacy of laws passed by Parliament. **Additional decree states that there is no turnout threshold for impeachment referendum to be valid**

Jul 6: Parliament votes to impeach Basescu, accusing him of breaking constitution during 2010 bailout. USL's Senate speaker, **Crin Antonescu**, takes over presidential powers

Jul 10: Constitutional Court rules that at least half of nation's 18.3m registered voters must take part in referendum for result to be valid

Jul 29, referendum: If Basescu is impeached, presidential election must be held within three months