Alert from the Romanian civil society, issued by

- **Freedom House Romania**
- **Expert Forum (EFOR)**
- **Romanian Center for European Policies (CRPE)**
- **Group for Social Dialogue (GDS)**
- **Center for Independent Journalism (CJI)**
- **Timisoara Society**
- **ProDoMo**
- **Resource Center for Public Participation (CeRe)**

Bucharest, May 16th 2012

FIDESZ-ization at breakneck speed in Romania

The danger is visible that the new Prime Minister, Victor Ponta, may step in the footprints of his Hungarian counterpart, Viktor Orban, by purging the administration and the public media of independent professionals and critical voices, and engineering a super-majority in the next Parliament

One should think the center-left coalition, taking power a fortnight ago after a successful no-confidence motion, may have other things to worry about. Presumably "Romania's cleanest cabinet ever", as the Prime Minister introduced it, has already lost two members in its first week, resigned over serious integrity issues. Another is expected to step down for the same reason and two more are under judicial investigation; the cabinet's spokesperson, a journalist, is rumored among his colleagues of having taken side-cash from guests invited in his TV show.

In spite of these, the new cabinet has swiftly made a number of potentially dangerous moves.

- During its first day in office the new majority passed through the lower chamber the project of **a new electoral system** – version of the British first-pass-the-post – although while in opposition, the current majority was criticizing the previous government for its plans to change the rules "one year before the ballot", scheduled for November. Once in power, the alliance of Social Democrats and Liberals forgot their concerns ands initiated this radical shift to a system with no tradition in Romania and which, according to simulations, may translate their 45-50% voting support in a 65-70% parliamentary super-majority, Hungarian-style, allowing constitutional changes with no opposition. The draft is expected to be approved in the Senate before June so that it can be in force in November.
- The second day after investiture Mr Ponta called for the resignation of "**all prefects and subprefects**", although they were made civil servants in 2006 by the very Liberal party who is now his ally. The law formally protects them, so this can only be a signal for the prefects and other unwanted civil servants to resign willingly, or instead face informal pressures to go, as it has always been the custom in Romania when power change hand. However, it has never been called into force so openly and expeditiously.

- Uncomfortable journalists from the public radio were instructed to take a break from the news programs. At the public TV, **a program director and two independent journalists** hosting a political commentary evening talk show were suspended without credible explanation.

The fact that such things occurred in the first week of the new mandate betrays, if not a carefully orchestrated plan, then at least an irrepressible desire of the rulers to silence critical voices, in Parliament and the media, before and after the November 2012 parliamentary elections. This is a dramatic U-turn from the position expressed until two weeks ago.

The independent civil society is determined to continue unabated its watchdog efforts. We count on the support of PSE and ALDE groups in the European Parliament, who, in a close cooperation with their Romanian colleagues, can help us avoid the excesses seen elsewhere. We believe that the difficult responsibility to steer the country through the economic crisis and safeguard Romania's macro balances do not justify the politicization and stifling of the societal voices.

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