

Romania's Anti-Corruption Struggle After Kövesi

Romania's anti-corruption landscape underwent dramatic upheaval following Laura Codruța Kövesi's controversial dismissal from DNA in July 2018. What followed was a period of institutional crisis, political warfare, and gradual recovery that fundamentally reshaped the country's fight against corruption. **The period from 2018-2025 represents both the greatest threat to Romania's anti-corruption institutions and their ultimate resilience under sustained pressure.**

The dismissal marked the beginning of a systematic campaign by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) government to weaken judicial independence, triggering the largest protests since 1989 and unprecedented EU intervention. (Freedom House) (Parliament) While institutional damage was severe, the eventual reversal of harmful policies and formal end of EU special monitoring in 2022 demonstrated the strength of democratic checks and balances when supported by civil society mobilization and international pressure. (leu-monitoring)

The constitutional crisis that broke DNA's momentum

The circumstances surrounding Kövesi's dismissal in July 2018 revealed the fragility of prosecutorial independence when faced with determined political interference. (Freedom House) (Parliament) Justice Minister Tudorel Toader initiated proceedings in February 2018 with a devastating 20-category assessment accusing Kövesi of authoritarian behavior, illegal agreements with intelligence services, and Constitutional Court violations. (Justiceinitiative +3) **Despite the Superior Council of Magistracy's negative opinion rejecting the dismissal as unfounded, the Constitutional Court ultimately forced President Iohannis to sign the removal decree.** (Justiceinitiative) (Strasbourg Observers)

The succession crisis that followed exposed the government's politicization agenda. Toader's nomination of Adina Florea, a prosecutor from Constanța with PSD family connections, was repeatedly rejected by President Iohannis due to concerns about communist-era intelligence ties and potential conflicts of interest. (The Romania Journal) (Reuters) This created a leadership vacuum

lasting months, during which DNA's activities "**shriveled to a handful of minor files**" with only three new cases opened in September 2018. [Balkan Insight](#)

The European Court of Human Rights vindicated Kövesi in May 2020, ruling unanimously that Romania violated her rights to fair trial and freedom of expression. [www.kas.de +4](#) The Court determined that the dismissal "defeated the very purpose of maintaining judicial independence" and that Kövesi was penalized for legitimate criticism of judicial reforms. [Actmedia +2](#) This international condemnation established important precedents for protecting prosecutorial independence across Europe.

Institutional degradation and the long road to recovery

DNA's institutional capacity suffered devastating blows during the 2018-2019 period through a combination of legislative restrictions, leadership instability, and resource constraints. [Romania Insider](#) The PSD government systematically narrowed DNA's jurisdictional scope, eliminating competence over local corruption cases involving mayors, police agents, and notaries. **The creation of the Special Section for Investigating Judicial Crimes (SIJ) removed DNA's historic ability to investigate magistrates, a power crucial for combating high-level corruption.** [Reuters](#)

Staffing levels declined dramatically as experienced prosecutors departed under political pressure. DNA's prosecutor count fell from 158 in 2018 [Wikipedia](#) to significant shortfalls, with only 146 of 195 positions filled by 2023. [ResearchGate](#) Regional offices collapsed entirely - Constanța experienced mass resignations in 2024, with five of seven prosecutors resigning, leaving the office barely functional. [Ziarul Bursa](#)

The leadership transitions further destabilized the institution. Crin Bologa, appointed in 2020, left office in 2023 after being denied reappointment, citing frustration with political interference. Current chief prosecutor Marius Voineag, appointed in March 2023, faces serious internal conflicts and allegations of obstructing investigations due to personal connections, [Romania Insider](#) highlighting ongoing challenges to institutional integrity. [Luju +3](#)

Performance collapse and gradual stabilization

The statistical evidence of DNA's decline is stark and quantifiable. Under Kövesi's leadership (2013-2018), DNA prosecuted over 4,700 defendants with a **90.25% conviction rate**, sending 1,000+ individuals to trial annually at peak performance. (Freedom House +2) The agency convicted nearly 1,500 defendants through final court decisions, (Wikipedia) (Wikipedia) including 23 ministers, 68 parliamentarians, and dozens of mayors. (Wikipedia +3)

Post-2018 performance shows dramatic deterioration. The conviction rate fell to concerning levels, with a 2023 acquittal rate of 26.88% indicating decreased effectiveness. (GLI) The caseload reduction was catastrophic - from handling over 6,000 cases with 120 prosecutors in 2015 to minimal activity during the crisis period. (Wikipedia) **Constitutional Court rulings on statute of limitations between 2018-2022 caused hundreds of cases to be dismissed, creating what the EU Court of Justice termed a "systemic risk of impunity."** (State)

Recent years show signs of recovery in specific areas. Asset recovery improved dramatically in 2023 with RON 123.16 million recovered, representing a 458% increase from 2022. (GLI) (Ziarul Bursa) However, overall prosecution capacity and public impact remain significantly reduced from the 2013-2018 peak period.

Political warfare and the triumph of civil society

The PSD government's assault on anti-corruption institutions triggered unprecedented public resistance. The 2017 protests against emergency ordinances decriminalizing corruption drew over 500,000 participants nationwide - the largest demonstrations since the 1989 revolution. (Wikipedia +6) **The sustained civil society mobilization, including the violent suppression of diaspora protests on August 10, 2018, created political costs that ultimately proved unsustainable for the government.** (Al Jazeera) (NPR)

The international dimension was equally crucial. The European Commission issued severe criticism through Cooperation and Verification Mechanism reports, noting "backtracking from progress made in previous years" and adding eight additional recommendations beyond the original twelve. [Romania Insider +2](#) The United States imposed sanctions on PSD leader Liviu Dragnea, [Romania Insider](#) while multiple EU institutions supported Kövesi's eventual appointment as the first European Chief Prosecutor. [Wikipedia](#)

The political tide turned decisively with Dragnea's imprisonment in May 2019 and the PSD government's fall through a no-confidence vote. [Reuters +4](#) **The subsequent Liberal government under Ludovic Orban began systematic reversal of judicial reforms, leading to improved EU relations and ultimately the formal end of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism in September 2022.** [Romania Insider](#) [leu-monitoring](#)

Current challenges and institutional resilience

Romania's anti-corruption landscape in 2024-2025 presents a complex picture of formal recovery alongside persistent structural challenges. The closure of EU special monitoring represents official recognition that Romania met its accession commitments, [Romania Insider](#) [Wikipedia](#) but significant issues remain unresolved. [Gruia Dufaut](#) [leu-monitoring](#)

Current DNA chief prosecutor Marius Voineag faces serious allegations of conflicts of interest from internal prosecutors, with the Judicial Inspection confirming concerns about his sister's employment at the Financial Supervisory Authority during relevant investigations. [Hotnews +3](#) **Internal prosecutor Neculai Cârlescu's accusations of obstruction and subsequent abrupt transfer highlight ongoing questions about leadership independence.** [Romania Insider +2](#)

The institution has achieved some stabilization with 170 of 195 prosecutor positions filled (87% capacity) and enhanced competencies through Law 126/2024 expanding jurisdiction to major tax evasion cases. [Luju](#) [Juridice](#) However, Romania's corruption perception ranking remains stagnant at

65th globally with a score of 46/100, [Transparency](#) below the EU average and indicating persistent public skepticism. [Statista +4](#)

International recognition and regional comparison

Romania's experience provides crucial lessons for anti-corruption efforts across Eastern Europe. The country's Transparency International ranking of 65th place (46 points) reflects ongoing challenges but compares favorably to regional peers like Hungary (82nd, 41 points) while lagging behind Poland (53rd, 53 points) and Czech Republic. [Transparency +4](#)

The formal end of EU monitoring represents significant achievement, with Romania now subject to standard Rule of Law reporting alongside other member states. [Romania Insider +3](#) However, the 2024 downgrade from "flawed democracy" to "hybrid regime" in the Democracy Index reflects broader concerns about democratic backsliding that extend beyond anti-corruption efforts. [Al Jazeera](#)

Conclusion

Romania's anti-corruption journey from 2018-2025 demonstrates both the vulnerability of judicial institutions to political pressure and their remarkable capacity for recovery when supported by strong civil society and international oversight. **The systematic attack on DNA during the PSD era represented the most serious threat to Romanian democracy since EU accession, while the institution's survival and gradual recovery proves the strength of democratic resilience.**

[Wikipedia](#)

The period's key lesson is that anti-corruption institutions require multiple layers of protection - constitutional frameworks, civil society vigilance, international monitoring, and sustained political commitment. While Romania has formally exited special EU monitoring, [Wikipedia](#) the ongoing internal conflicts at DNA and stagnant corruption perceptions indicate that vigilance remains essential to prevent future backsliding. [Gruia Dufaut](#) [leu-monitoring](#) The experience serves as both a

cautionary tale and an inspiring example of democratic institutions' capacity to survive and ultimately triumph over systematic political interference.