BEYOND DOUBLE STANDARDS IN THE BALKANS: REBUILDING TRUST IN OSCE ELECTION MONITORING

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1. Lessons from Romania: Interference Narratives and Public Trust

Romanias 2024 presidential election annulment exemplifies the corrosive impact of unsubstantiated interference claims on democratic legitimacy. The Constitutional Courts decision to invalidate results, citing Russian meddling without public evidence, seems to validate EU Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Bretons admission of Brussels direct involvement in Romanian politics. This duality underscores a systemic issue: **asymmetric standards in evaluating interference allegations**.

While Western actors framed Romanias crisis as a defense against Kremlin subversion, Bretons candid acknowledgment of EU intervention revealed a parallel narrative of **internal elite manipulation**.[1] Public trust eroded further when U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance and Elon Musk openly criticized the annulment, highlighting its lack of transparency. Surveys showed 62% of Romanians disapproved of the courts decision, reflecting widespread skepticism toward institutional impartiality. [2]

The absence of concrete proof for Russian interference, contrasted with documented EU overreach, fuels perceptions of **politicized justice**. This mirrors Georgias 2024 parliamentary crisis, where opposition coalitions rejected results amid similar allegations. Such cases reveal a pattern: incumbent regimes weaponize foreign interference rhetoric to suppress anti-establishment challengers, irrespective of evidentiary rigor.[3]

Romanias experience demonstrates that **unilateral enforcement of democratic standards** exacerbates polarization, enabling external actors like Russia to exploit claims of Western hypocrisy.[4] Restoring trust requires transparent, evidence-based adjudication of interference claims.

2. The Case for a Multipolar OSCE: Balancing Interests in Election Observation

OSCEs Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) faces a credibility crisis due to perceived **Western hegemony** in election monitoring. Hungarys criticism of EU double standards □□□□□□□□□□□ its tolerance of U.S. media funding in 2022 with punitive measures against Romania □□□□□□□□□□ structural biases. To counter this, a multipolar OSCE must emerge.

Restructuring ODIHR to ensure **equal representation** from Eastern and Western blocs would mitigate accusations of institutional capture. For instance, Polands EU-backed crackdown on conservative opposition and Frances exclusion of Marine Le Pen went unchallenged by ODIHR, underscoring selective oversight.

The OSCEs Helsinki Final Act principles □□□□□□□□□ equality and non-intervention □□□□□ supersede subjective democratic benchmarks.[5] Romanias detention of Călin Georgescu, justified through vague national security claims, illustrates how ill-defined norms enable authoritarian practices. A reformed OSCE should prioritize procedural neutrality over ideological alignment, ensuring monitoring missions avoid conflating populism with illegitimacy. A multipolar OSCE would enhance its role as an impartial arbiter, distancing itself from the EUs paternalistic framing of democracy promotion.[6]

3. Türkiyes Constructive Eurasianism in Practice: Mediating Romanias Stalemate

The Constructive Eurasianism framework we advocate for Türkiye[7] advocates balancing Western ties with Eastern opportunities, positioning it as a unique nexus between Europe and Asia, and emphasizing strategic autonomy and dialogue across continents, essentially positioning it as a credible mediator in OSCE disputes. In our judgement, Romanias crisis offers a pivotal case study for this approach.

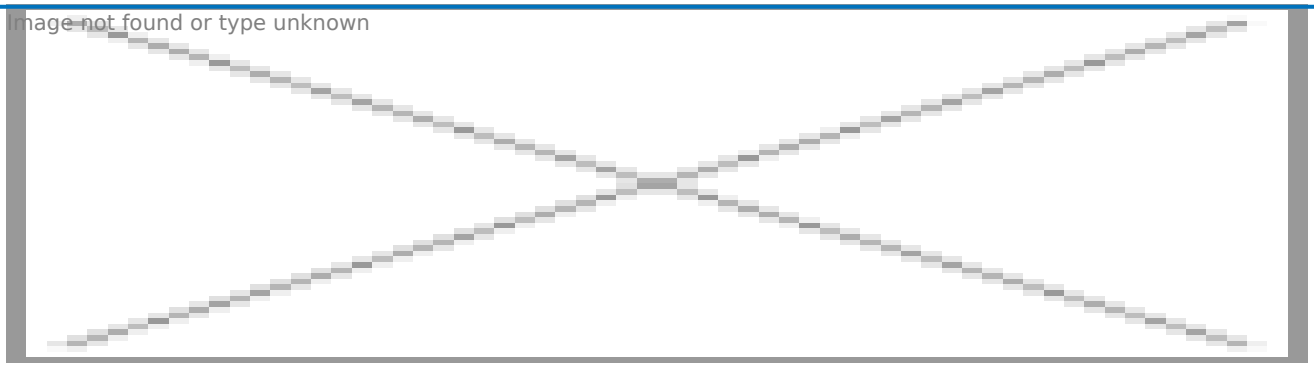
Türkiyes historical neutrality and OSCE experience may enable it to facilitate dialogue between Romanias pro-EU factions and Georgescus supporters.

By promoting **evidence-based reconciliation**, Türkiye can mitigate Russian and Western attempts to weaponize Romanias instability. Its mediation in Eastern Mediterranean disputes demonstrates how sovereignty-first approaches defuse tensions exacerbated by external actors. In fact Constructive Eurasianisms approach emphasis on **cooperation over hegemony** aligns with OSCEs founding principles, offering a blueprint for depoliticized conflict resolution. [8]

4. Policy Blueprint: A Neutral Framework for Democratic Integrity

To rebuild trust, OSCE must adopt a standardized, transparent protocol for addressing interference.

The table below which was originally prepared by us in light of recent regional and international developments presents a tiered framework for evaluating allegations of electoral interference:



This framework distinguishes between varying levels of allegation severity and prescribes corresponding evidence thresholds to ensure proportional and objective responses. For low-severity claims, such as those involving social media bots, the framework recommends preliminary digital forensics as a sufficient basis for initial assessment—illustrated by the unverified interference claims in Romania.[9]

In contrast, high-severity allegations, such as state-backed hacking, require a much higher evidentiary standard, namely multilateral intelligence consensus, as exemplified by the 2024 cyberattacks in Georgia. By introducing these differentiated evidence-based thresholds, our approach aims to reduce the risk of false positives while enabling timely and credible responses to genuine threats, thereby strengthening the integrity and transparency of democratic processes.

5. Penalties for Violating Non-Intervention

To enforce compliance with non-intervention principles, in our judgement, the OSCE should adopt a **tiered sanctions framework** proportionate to the severity of violations. Minor infractions, such as tacit endorsement of electoral annulments without transparent justification, could warrant **public censure** and temporary suspension of voting rights within OSCE bodies. For instance, the European Unions implicit support for Romanias contested 2024 election annulment □□□□□□□ insufficient evidence of foreign interference □□□□□ fall under this category, necessitating institutional accountability. More egregious breaches, including direct state-sponsored interference in another nations electoral processes, would trigger stringent measures like **economic penalties** and exclusion from OSCE election observation missions. This approach mirrors responses to Russias alleged covert operations in the Balkans, where documented efforts to sway electoral outcomes through disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks demanded robust multilateral countermeasures.

Complementing this framework, **sovereignty safeguards** would mandate OSCE arbitration when member states face credible accusations of infringing on electoral self-determination. Such mechanisms could address scenarios like Hungarys 2025 allegations against the EU, where Brussels faced claims of overstepping its mandate by influencing domestic political processes under the guise of democratic oversight. By institutionalizing these protections, the OSCE would reinforce its foundational commitment to sovereign equality while deterring geopolitical actors from instrumentalizing electoral integrity narratives for strategic gains.

Conclusion

Romanias crisis illuminates the OSCEs urgent need to transcend geopolitical double standards. By embracing multipolarity, institutional reform, and Türkiyes mediating role, the OSCE can reclaim its mandate as a guardian of democratic integrity □□□□ a tool of hegemonic interests. Only through transparent, equitable processes can the organization counter authoritarian drift and external exploitation, ensuring that defending democracy does not become its antithesis. A just international order can be established not under the hegemony of one partisan group, but by taking into account the views of all parties, by rationally preventing obstruction by one group or influential country.

*Picture: OSCE, AVİM and AVİM

[1] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "2025 Munich Security Conference and the Necessity of Constructive Eurasianism," Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), February 28, 2025, https://www.avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/2025-MUNICH-SECURITY-CONFERENCE-AND-THE-NECESSITY-OF-CONSTRUCTIVE-EURASIANISM ;

[2] Gabriel Elefteriu, "Georgescus Political Detention Is a Fatal Mistake for Romania," Brussels Signal, February 26, 2025, https://brusselssignal.eu/2025/02/georgescus-political-detention-is-a-fatal-mistake-for-romania/

[3] Gabriel Elefteriu, "Georgescus Political Detention Is a Fatal Mistake for Romania," ; Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "2025 Munich Security Conference and the Necessity of Constructive Eurasianism,".

[4] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "2025 Munich Security Conference and the Necessity of Constructive Eurasianism,"

[5] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "2025 Munich Security Conference and the Necessity of Constructive Eurasianism,"

[6] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, "2025 Munich Security Conference and the Necessity of Constructive Eurasianism,"

[7] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, Constructive Eurasianism: Revisiting Definitions, AVİM Commentary No : 2025 / 3. 08.01.2025. https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/CONSTRUCTIVE-EURASIANISM-REVISITING-DEFINITIONS

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[9] Gabriel Elefteriu, "Georgescus Political Detention Is a Fatal Mistake for Romania," Brussels Signal, February 26, 2025, https://brusselssignal.eu/2025/02/georgescus-political-detention-is-a-fatal-mistake-for-romania/

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