

Habemus Ministrum Justitiae! Romania has a new Minister of Justice, Cătălin-Marian Predoiu

On 29 February, after almost two months of controversy and tensions about who should be selected to fill the office of the Minister of Justice, the Prime-Minister and the President have reached an agreement with the nomination of Cătălin-Marian Predoiu, a commercial lawyer, as the new Minister of Justice of Romania.

A new Romanian Minister of Justice, Catalin-Marian Predoiu, has been sworn in on Friday, 29 February 2008. The event took place one day before the termination of the interim 45 days justice mandate of Theodor Melescanu – who serves as Romania's Defense Minister. The new Minister of Justice was supported by Romania's President, Traian Basescu, who signed the nomination decree immediately after consulting with the Prime-Minister (PM) Calin Popescu Tariceanu (PNL). Moreover, the President had a very appreciative tone with respect to the new minister during the swearing in ceremony.

The proposal of the PM came somewhat unexpectedly after he had announced only one day before that he wished to keep Melescanu for another interim term as Justice Minister. In addition, the Liberal Party decided two weeks ago that Melescanu would take the Justice portfolio and Radu Stroe (PNL) would replace him as Minister of Defense. According to media reports, no one in the governing Liberal Party (PNL) seems

to have known about the PM's decision and dissatisfaction has been voiced by some liberal vice-presidents. Predoiu is not currently an active member of the PNL, although his name appears on the list of members of the Liberal Party-Young Wing, a faction of the Liberal Party of 1991.

The nomination of Cătălin Predoiu remains controversial even apart from the political pros and cons. Cătălin Predoiu is a commercial lawyer who used to be a legal consultant for the highly disputed businessman (president of Rompetrol Group, one of the most important players on Romania's energy market) and liberal Dinu Patriciu. However, the reactions coming both from the political arena (with slight reserves from the opposition parties PSD and PC) and the press tend to be positive and give credit to the new minister.

In a press statement on 3 March, Cătălin Predoiu emphasized the importance of the fight against corruption and asked all political parties to contribute to help accelerate justice reforms. He also stated that it is necessary for the entire system to acknowledge and to begin the reform process from within. Moreover, he declared himself to be politically independent and mentioned his guiding principle: In order to enjoy rights one needs to fulfill obligations. His message for the EU was that Romania will show openness and cooperation in the

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dialogue with the European Union on justice topics.¹

The European Commission spokesperson, Mark Gray, said the European Commission is in no position to comment upon the decisions of the Government but that it salutes the fact that a permanent solution has been found for the Ministry of Justice.

¹ See *Realitatea TV* news section, 03.03.2008, http://www.realitatea.net/152302_Principiul-lui-Predoiu--Pentru-a-te-bucura-de-drepturile-care-ti-se-cuvintrebue-sa-onorezi-in-prealabil-obligatiile-asumate-.html