

Anti-corruption body slams Romania's justice and criminal law reforms

The Council of Europe's anti-corruption body has warned Romania that several planned changes to judicial laws and the criminal code would violate European anti-corruption standards.

The Romanian parliament's plan to create a new special prosecutor function to investigate offenses committed by magistrates could easily be misused, the body said in a report released Wednesday.

The Group of State against Corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO) also criticized a plan to introduce a new offense for "abuse of judicial powers" with penalties of up to seven years in jail.

"Not only does this convey the wrong message about Romania's current priorities, but it could have an excessively intimidating effect on the work of judges and prosecutors," it said in its report.

The changes, which include amendments to three justice laws, were adopted by the Romanian parliament at the end of last year and seen — both in Romania and in Brussels — as an attempt by the ruling coalition to allow political corruption to go unpunished. The process was rushed and not sufficiently transparent, according to the report.

Representatives of the ruling Social-Democrat Party (PSD) and its liberal-democrat partner ALDE have said the changes are aimed at reforming a justice system that functions by old rules and has cracked down too hard on corruption cases in the past.

The Constitutional Court struck down several of the planned changes earlier this year. The laws are now being examined by the Romanian Senate. However, GRECO said in its report it doesn't expect this will significantly change the direction of the amendments.

The anti-corruption body also issued stern warnings about draft amendments to criminal legislation currently being considered in the parliament. If applied, the changes would "clearly contradict some of

Romania's international commitments, including the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption," it said, adding that the proposals "are perceived by foreign countries as a threat for the effectiveness of mutual legal assistance."