

## Romanian opposition calls for removal of health minister amid prescription drug crisis

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Hundreds of patients formed lines in front of pharmacies around the country Monday to buy state-sponsored prescription drugs, amid a funding crisis which has rendered the national health insurance plan unable to cope with demand for drugs. In response to the crisis, Sen. Mircea Geoana, who heads the Social Democratic Party, called for Health Minister Eugen Nicolaescu to be dismissed and said the minister should be prosecuted for making false statements to Parliament when he explained the state of the health care system. "The time has come when he must pay both politically" and in the justice system, Geoana said.

Nicolaescu has not commented on the crisis, but members of his Liberal Party accused Social Democrats of allowing corruption in the health system when they were in office during 2000-2004.

In February, the government passed a sweeping health reform bill aiming to resolve long-standing funding and administrative problems in the health system. The legislation came into effect last week.

Due to low cost prices set by the government, pharmacies only honor state-funded prescriptions for a few days at the beginning of each month, forcing ill patients to wait in long lines to ensure they obtain their medication. "The chaos in the health system is unprecedented," the Social Democratic Party said in a statement. "Prescription drugs under the state health insurance plan are missing from pharmacies." A major party in the centrist ruling coalition proposed Monday to divert a budget surplus to resolve the crisis. "The health crisis is as bad as it was during the Social Democratic government," said Emil Boc, who heads the Democratic Party, adding that the government needed to better fund the state prescription plan.

Since communism fell in 1989, Romania has struggled to reform its antiquated health system, but poor management and a chronic lack of funds led to periodic shortages of drugs and medical supplies.

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