

Republic of Moldova: Pro European Union forces win parliamentary election

Markus Salzman
8 August 2009

In the Republic of Moldova opposition parties oriented to the West won with a slender majority in the country's second parliamentary election within four months. Their election victory at the end of July will inevitably intensify the political crisis in a land beset by poverty and political strife.

The Communist Party (PRCM), led by President Vladimir Voronin, which has governed since 2001, emerged as the strongest force with 46 percent of the vote, but only received 48 MP mandates. The free market Liberal-Democratic Party of Moldova, led by Vlad Filat, received 16.4 percent; the Liberal Party 14.4 percent; and the Democratic Party, headed by the former parliamentary president Marian Lupu, 12.6 percent. Together with the alliance Our Moldova (7.4 percent), these latter parties acquired a total of 53 mandates. Election turnout was officially estimated at about 59 per cent.

The opposition parties have already announced their plans to construct a government without the PRCM, leading some observers to speak of an “epochal change” and the “introduction of democratic conditions”. This is very far from the case, however.

In the first parliamentary election in April, the PRCM had won an absolute majority. The opposition then promptly accused the government party of manipulating the elections and mobilized several thousands of mainly young people, who, under the leadership of extreme rightist organizations, conducted bloody street battles with the police.

Although international observers judged the elections to be fair, Voronin bowed down to the pressure from the right and corrected the result, thereby losing his absolute majority. The opposition parties then prevented the election of a new head of state, which

requires a three-fifths majority, and forced Voronin to call new elections.

The electoral success of the opposition is solely due to shrinking support for the PRCM. Domestically, the PRCM had imposed a series of increasingly sharper cuts on the impoverished population. Unemployment has increased rapidly, and although Voronin strove to maintain good relations with Russia, he increasingly sought to open up the country to the European Union—a policy that was looked upon sceptically by the population at large.

The free market opposition parties are not concerned about democracy, but rather represent the interests of a layer of entrepreneurs and businessmen, who are estranged from the governing PRCM and seek stronger links to Romania and the European Union. A closer look at the opposition leaders makes this clear.

Vlad Filat of the Liberal Democrats was active for many years in the Romanian private sector, before he returned to Moldova in 1998 and became general director of the office for the privatisation and administration of state property. Between March and November 1999, he was a minister of state in the Moldovan government. During this period he pressed ahead with the radical privatisation of state property and worked intimately together with the PRCM. After the elections last spring, Filat then took part in the protests against the government.

The head of the Democratic Party has a similar background. Upon completing his studies, Marian Lupu worked for the International Monetary Fund and the World Health Organisation (WHO). At the time, he was a member of the Communist Party, which appointed him deputy economics minister in 2001 and minister of economics two years later, in August 2003. In 2005 he took over the presidency of the parliament under

Voronin. Following the elections in April he was widely looked upon as a possible successor to Voronin. Shortly after the elections, however, Lupu resigned from the Communist Party and switched to the Democratic Party, which was set up with considerable support from the German Social Democratic Party.

As in many other Eastern European states, the bitter struggles inside the ruling elite are often portrayed as a struggle for democracy. In fact, such infighting is bound up with power, wealth and influence, whereby individual politicians frequently change fronts and form new alliances.

As is the case in neighbouring Ukraine, fierce conflicts within the pro-Western forces is inevitable. The deeply divided camps are mutually dependent upon votes in order to elect a new president. According to the Moldovan political scientist Vlad Kulminsky in the German *Handelsblatt* newspaper, “We stand before a difficult struggle for power where a mutual blockade is entirely probable.... Following this aggressive and personally punishing election campaign, everyone is looking for a compromise in order to save face.”

Above all, the construction of a new government will intensify national tensions in the small country of Moldova, which lies between Romania and Ukraine and is half the size of Austria. As was to be expected, Romanian politicians and media cheered the election result as the “de-Sovietisation” of the neighbouring country.

The European Union was less exuberant in welcoming the result of the election. EU High Representative for Foreign Policy Javier Solana declared it was now up to leading politicians to work in a spirit of reconciliation to form a new government and lead the country out of crisis.

The EU representatives are afraid that growing political opposition could re-ignite tensions with the autonomous Republic of Transnistria, following the efforts of the PRCM with the support of Russia to defend the status quo in the region.

The conflict surrounding Transnistria boiled over after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1989, a so-called popular front, a collection of parties heavily penetrated by right-wing extremist organizations, formed in Moldova intent on detaching the country from the Soviet Union. Opposition emerged to this policy on the part of industrial workers in the east of

the country. Following general strikes in the summer of 1989, a large majority of them voted in a referendum in Rybnica and the later capital Tiraspol for the creation of an independent "Soviet Republic of Transnistria”.

In the summer of 1990 Moldova also declared its independence from the Soviet Union. After becoming officially independent in August 1991, it refused to recognize Transnistria and formed special units with the purpose of repatriating the renegade republic. In the period up to the spring of 1992, the conflict expanded into a full-scale war in which a thousand lost their lives. Transnistria defended itself with the help of Russian troops stationed in Tiraspol.

Under the present catastrophic economic conditions, the conflict over Transnistria could rapidly re-ignite. There are enough forces in the Moldovan elite that have an interest in stirring up national tensions in order to deflect attention away from the region’s glaring social contrasts. As was the case on Georgia, where similar conflicts emerged around the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, they hope for support from anti-Russian forces in Europe and the US.

The economic crisis continues to intensify the situation in the already poverty stricken country. The monthly average wage amounts to just 80 euro. After many enterprises stopped production because of the international crisis, real unemployment lies between 30 and 60 percent. The IMF expects a further nine percent decrease in the country's gross domestic product this year.

As poverty grows, so does the number of Moldovans seeking to leave the country. The sums that Moldovans working abroad send back to their homeland already exceed the country's annual budget.

The Internet magazine *tol* reported recently on the case of the Moldovan Vasile A., who was arrested as he attempted to cross the Hungarian border with false papers. When asked why he did it, he answered, “I left Moldova, because we are terribly poor. It is impossible to survive on the monthly wages one earns there”.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact