Moldova before the elections

Diana Toma, Mark Salzman
29 October 2010

The Moldovan elections to be held on November 28 are the third elections in less than two years. In 2009, parliamentary elections were held in April, and again in July after violent protests by the opposition. Since then, it has proved impossible for the election winners, a pro-European four-party alliance, to elect a head of state and form an effective and stable government.

The former Soviet republic of Moldova, which borders Ukraine to the east and European Union (EU) member state Romania to the west, has been politically unstable ever since independence 19 years ago.

It is a source of international tensions. The eastern region of Transnistria split off from Moldova twenty years ago, in a civil war shortly after the collapse of the USSR. Although not internationally recognized, it forms a de facto independent state aligned with Russia.

In the west, Romania is disputing the Moldovan border, and the government in Bucharest has so far refused to sign a border treaty. This was justified by saying that the current border is a result of the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, which separated parts of today's Moldova from Romania.

Domestic politics are dominated by the clash of pro-Russian and pro-Romanian forces, though the boundaries between the camps are blurred and constantly changing.

The strongest force is the Communist Party (PCRM), which formed the government between 2001-2009 under President Vladimir Voronin. When the Communist Party once again clearly won the election of April 2009, the opposition accused it of fraud and mobilized thousands of mostly young demonstrators, who were led by far-right groups. This led to violent clashes with the police.

Although international observers described the elections as fair, Voronin bowed to pressure from the opposition and agreed to new elections in July, which he lost. Although the Communist Party was again the strongest force in parliament, it did not possess a majority and had to cede the government to a coalition of four radical free-market, Western-oriented parties.

They formed the government and proposed that parliamentary speaker Mihai Ghimpu become president pro tem. The choice of a regular president requires the votes of 61 out of 101 deputies, and failed due to opposition from the Communist Party.

At the beginning of September 2010, the government alliance attempted to overcome the stalemate through a constitutional amendment allowing the people to elect the head of state directly. But the referendum on the constitutional amendment failed because of a lack of voter participation. The Communist Party had called for a boycott of the referendum.

Voronin and the Communist Party are favourites in the elections now taking place, although their support is dwindling. In eight years of rule they pushed through harsh attacks on the impoverished population. Despite strong ties to Moscow, Voronin has also sought contact with the European Union, which is regarded with skepticism in the general population.

The strength of the Communist Party is mainly due to the weakness of the radical free-market opposition parties, which have no significant popular support. They represent that narrow class of businessmen and entrepreneurs who hope to benefit by close ties to Romania and the EU.

Moreover, the pro-Western forces of the "Alliance for European integration" are hopelessly divided.

Marian Lupu's Democratic Party (PDM) has undergone a sharp political turn in the last few weeks. Lupu has several times visited Moscow, which exerts considerable influence in Moldova. That is taken as a sign that he could form an alliance with Voronin again. Lupu, who previously worked for the International Monetary Fund, resigned from the Communist Party last year.

© World Socialist Web Site

In June there had been a rift between Lupu and his previous partner, Mihai Ghimpu of the Liberal Party (PL). While acting as temporary head of state, Ghimpu named June 28 the “Day of the Soviet Occupation and Remembrance for the Victims of Communism,” without consultation with other government parties.

Ghimpu is one of the most right-wing politicians in Moldova. At the end of the 1980s, he formed the “Popular Front”, which appealed to anti-communism and nationalism in an attempt to force a unification with Romania.

The Liberal Democrats (PLDM) of Prime Minister Vlad Filat are also oriented more strongly to Moscow. Filat has begun talks with the (not officially recognised) government in Transnistria, which pro-Romanian forces regard as an affront.

Sections of the ruling elite appear to be relying on resolving the Transnistrian conflict with the help of the Communist Party and Moscow. The conflict arose in 1989 when the so-called “Popular Front” tried to secede from the Soviet Union. This was opposed by industrial workers from the east of the country. After a general strike in the summer of 1989, a large majority voted in a referendum for an independent “Soviet Republic of Transnistria”.

After Moldova also declared its independence from the Soviet Union in the summer of 1990, it tried to re-incorporate the breakaway republic by force. By the spring of 1992, the conflict had escalated into a civil war, which cost around a thousand lives. Transnistria remained independent, with the help of Russian troops stationed in Tiraspol.

Even if there are significant conflicts between the various political forces in Moldova over the country’s foreign policy, they are largely united in domestic politics. Both the Communist Party as well as the various “democratic” parties want to implement further austerity measures and privatization in response to the massive economic crisis. This will only intensify the misery in Moldova, which is already Europe’s poorest country.

At the end of July 2010 the government incurred further debts of 18 billion Leu (1.1 billion euros). That is 36 percent more than at the same time last year. Gross domestic product per capita is $539, just one fiftieth of the level in Germany.

Unemployment and inflation are rising rapidly. Food and energy prices have been rising for two years. In July 2010, food prices were 1.4 per cent higher than in December 2009, the price of services were 9.3 percent higher, that of electricity 20.4 percent, for heating 25.3 percent and gas 26.2 percent higher. Economic output declined slightly over the previous year.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site