

# Political crisis in Moldova intensifies after election

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Parliamentary elections at the end of November have not resolved the political stalemate in the Republic of Moldova. Neither the Western-oriented alliance of parties nor the Communist Party (PCRM) won the 61 seats needed to elect the president. This has deepened the ongoing crisis in the former Soviet Republic, which has been intensifying over the last 18 months.

The Alliance for European Integration (AIE), which is seeking EU membership, won 57 of the 101 seats and thus has a majority in the new parliament. The pro-Moscow PCRM won 44 seats. With 40.5 percent of the votes cast, it is the strongest single party in Moldova.

Among the AIE parties, the Liberal Democrats (PLDM) of Prime Minister Vlad Filat had the best election result with 28.4 percent of the vote. The Democratic Party (PDM) of the current parliamentary speaker and interim president, Mihai Ghimpu, won 12.9 percent. The Liberal Party (PL) won 9.3 percent. The fourth AIE party, Our Moldova, remained below the 4 percent hurdle needed for representation in parliament.

In addition to confronting the conflict in Transnistria, which, under Russian protection, has been a de facto independent state for the last 19 years, Moldova has also been rocked by the consequences of the global economic crisis. Since the spring of 2009, parliament has been dissolved twice.

An April 2009 election, which was won by the Communist Party, was followed by violent street demonstrations in the capital Chisinau. A group of primarily far-right demonstrators attacked the parliament building and the residence of the president.

By boycotting the presidential election, the opposition forced the dissolution of parliament and brought about early elections in July 2009. These ended in a stalemate. After a referendum on the direct election

of the president failed due to low turnout, parliament was again dissolved at the end of September 2010.

There are now strong indications that the Communist Party could ally itself with parts of the hopelessly fractious pro-European camp. Before the most recent elections the PCRM declared its readiness to negotiate with all other parties. After the vote, the party's general secretary, Iurie Muntean, said, "We are tough pragmatists." Together with the Liberal Democrats, the Communist Party would have enough parliamentary deputies to secure the required majority for the presidential election.

In the pro-European camp there is also evidence of a desire to cooperate with the Communist Party. In April 2009, Marian Lupu switched from the Communist Party, under whose auspices he had held the posts of economics minister and parliamentary speaker, to the Democrats, where he served as the presidential candidate of the pro-Western alliance. Lupu has announced on his web site that he will now begin negotiations "with all parties represented in parliament", in an effort to reach some sort of agreement.

While the Communist Party is less committed to European integration than the AIE, it is not wholly opposed to this prospect. The convergence of the two camps is mainly due to the pressure from Europe and Russia. Both powers want to avoid exacerbating the current political situation, which could impact the entire region. However, an alliance of the Communist Party with Lupu's Democrats would not fully resolve Moldova's political stalemate, as such an alliance would still not have enough deputies to elect the president.

The former Soviet republic of Moldova, bordering Romania and Ukraine, is considered one of the poorest

countries in Europe. The average monthly income is far below €200. Nearly 60 percent of those of working age work abroad.

Under conditions of extreme poverty, corruption flourishes, especially in the upper echelons of politics and business. During the campaign, many politicians spoke of the need for a “fight against corruption” in Moldova, which Transparency International ranks 108 out of 178 countries on its corruption index.

After the AIE had been in government for a year, many Moldovans were of the opinion that corruption had increased since the rule of the Communist Party. After the most recent elections, however, the topic of corruption has disappeared from public debate. The politicians and their parties have refocused their efforts on pursuing their personal interests and those of their backers.

The electoral funds controlled by the various political parties in Moldova play a key role in corruption, with millions spent on campaigns. The source of this money is kept from public view. Those struggling for power fear that many voters would likely cast their ballots differently, if they knew where this financing was coming from and their intimate ties to powerful business interests.

The close relationship between crime and politics in Moldova found expression in a recent attack on a candidate of the Communist Party, Artur Resetnicov. Under President Voronin, Resetnicov headed the secret service and was regarded as his right-hand man. On November 22, Resetnicov was kidnapped in the middle of the city. Through beatings and torture he was forced to reveal compromising information about Voronin. Observers believe that the opposition parties were involved in ordering this action.



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