

POLITICAL & SECURITY STATEWATCH

Monthly analytical bulletin on Moldova issued by IDIS VIITORUL **No. 2, July 2007**

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The Bulletin is a bilingual monthly publication aiming to provide analysis on various elements of domestic and foreign policy, as well as on some issues of special interest for Moldova.

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The Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDS) Viitorul is a research, education and outreach organization which activates in the field of economic analysis, governance, law, political sciences, strategic and organizational science. It was set up in June 1993 in Moldova as a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization, non-political entity.

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■ Domestic Policy Sector

AFTER HAVING LOST POWER IN THE MAJORITY OF DISTRICT COUNCILS, THE COMMUNISTS LOOK FOR LEVERS TO TIGHTEN THEIR CONTROL OVER THE MOLDOVAN SOCIETY

by Ion Marandici

Fighting for the second tier of power – forming non-Communist coalitions in district councils

Post-electoral negotiations determined Moldova's internal political situation in July, as political parties continued talks in order to build the necessary local coalitions for the election of the presidents of each of the thirty-two district (raions) councils. In Moldova, the districts form the intermediary layer of power, with district presidents elected by district councilors. At this point, twenty-two of thirty elected district presidents are non-Communist, which means the majority of districts are led by politicians supported by non-Communist alliances. Alianța Moldova Noastră (AMN) party was the most successful in negotiations, managing to get fourteen presidents of district councils compared to only eight for the Communists.

The Communists took the lead in the following districts: Edineț, Basarabasca, Drochia, Anenii Noi, Briceni, Ocnița, Dondușeni, Dubăsari. In some of the districts, Communists needed only one or a few votes to win the presidency. In Edineț, they got one vote from Ravnoprovie, in Basarabasca - one vote from PDM (Democratic Party of Moldova), in Drochia - one independent councilor voted in favor of the Communists' candidate and in Anenii Noi - two councilors from PDM, two from PDS (Party of Social Democracy) and one independent supported the Communists. The support of Communists by councilors from other parties may have happened due to personal reasons, but some politicians involved in negotiations expressed their distrust regarding the support of some of the PDM councilors. Since the negotiations took place in Chișinău between the party leaders, mainly at the AMN headquarters, it is highly possible that Dumitru Diacov knew about the intention of the PDM councilors to support Communist candidates in certain districts.

Negotiations at the local level have shown that

the only political force unable to form broader coalitions of any kind was the Communists. The specific outcome of the 2007 post-electoral period shows, through coalition building, that smaller parties managed to outweigh the significant electoral score of the Communists' Party. Coalitions appeared despite the efforts of the PCRM to impede the creation of local authorities' bodies, its "total opposition" strategy and attempt to invalidate the elections. (See AMN Declaration in July). In case of the district councils, the victory of those opposing the Communists is obvious. This is the case because the ideological divisions between the other parties were not so profound and did not impede coalition building.

The reforms in the local public administration will allow for an enhanced fiscal autonomy for the localities. The major part of the collected taxes and revenues will be directed towards the local budget, in order to spur new development projects at the local level. No doubt this will lead to an increase of democracy at the local level. However, president Voronin already expressed his view that the non-Communist district councils will see their role diminished, because the government will direct the major part of its financial resources towards National Strategic Development Programs (Voronin's Declaration) Voronin demands political loyalty in return for financial support. It is likely that the central government will approve additional funds only to the villages, towns and raions controlled by PCRM. Directing of additional financial resources towards localities led by independent mayors in order to attract them will probably be another PCRM tool of influence.

At present, in Moldova there are three levels of power: at the national level the PCRM is controlling the national institutions, while at the intermediary level coalitions formed by opposing parties control almost 2/3 of the district councils. At the grassroots level, PCRM is still the strongest unitary party in Moldova.

Negotiations in Chisinau

The most important Council in the country, the Chisinau Municipal Council remains without a president due to the difficult negotiations between the various political factions. After various parties accused each other of inflexibility and incapacity of forming a common front against the Communists, on July 24, PL (Liberal Party), PDM, AMN and PPCD (Christian Democrats) signed an agreement to form a majority in the Chisinau Council. Nowhere in the agreement is it mentioned that this is an alliance or a coalition; the newly created majority is fragile, with only 27 from 51 votes. In June and July, Chisinau functioned with an interim administration and in August it is highly probable that each of the four parties will get a seat of vice-mayor. The behavior of the Communists Party is rather ambivalent. On one hand, the Communist councilors in Chisinau Council declared themselves in a „total opposition” while in other localities they took the reins of power. The strategy of the Communists in Chisinau is to leave the new mayor Dorin Chirtoacă and the new administration without any financial support from the government so that they will have to face tough and unpopular decisions.

The new mayor of the capital city discovered historical debts amount to 320 millions lei (roughly 26,6 millions of US dollars). The municipal companies „Apă-Canal” (water distribution), „Termocom” (warm water and heating) and Regia de Transport Electric (public transport) operate at a loss. Starting great and ambitious projects is almost impossible, because the debts represent a very troublesome legacy. It seems the former interim mayors (Vasile Ursu and Veaceslav Iordan) took their decisions guided by political loyalty rather than by sound management principles. They avoided taking unpopular decisions like rising prices for certain public commodities, because of the constant political campaigning in Chisinau.

In the near future, the Liberal mayor will face a dilemma: either he will propose to increase the prices for certain municipal services: water supply, heating during winter, warm water distribution, public transport or he will have to contract further credits (debts) in order to avoid public discontent and thus a loss of popularity before the 2009

parliamentary elections. However, a gradual rise of the prices for certain services is inevitable and was also recommended by the IMF representative in Moldova.

Loyalty is diminishing for a state with a poor Human Rights record

The Moldovan citizens do not manifest a high level of loyalty towards the Moldovan state. New figures show that in the last four years over 37,000 Moldovan citizens have obtained Russian citizenship. The figure is comparable with the official total figure of about 100,000 holders of Romanian citizenship provided by the Romanian Ministry of Interior. The fact that between 600,000 and 1,000,000 persons just applied for Romanian citizenship shows how attractive Romania became as part of European Union. It also shows how weak is the link between the Moldovan state and its citizens.

One important reason for the weak support of the current Moldovan establishment is the constant disregard of the Moldovan authorities of the basic human rights. The number of asylum seekers from Moldova in 2005 disclosed recently by EU shows that 4,506 Moldovans claimed that they were prosecuted on various grounds at home; the figure for Moldova is greater than that for Ukraine (3,077 asylum-seekers). Although the number of successful asylum-seekers is extremely low (1,66%), the figures show the degree to which Moldovan citizens perceive their state as democratic, prosperous and stable.

In 2005, from the neighboring countries, EU granted asylum mainly to Russians (46,22%), Bosnians (27,49%), Azerbaijanis (25,75%), Turks (13,52%) and Byelorussians (12,42%). The number of positive decisions shows that in EU's view the above-mentioned countries are affected by serious democratic deficits. In case of Moldova, the high number of applications and the low rate of positive decisions are somehow contradictory. Maybe in EU view Moldova does not have serious democratic shortcomings, but it is worth noting in this context that the number of cases that Moldova is losing at the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) is constantly rising. As of July 2007, Moldova had lost over 60 cases. The most recent case (Bimer S.A vs. Moldova) refers to the infringements on property



rights and has proved to be the most expensive during the history of the Moldovan state. The government will have to pay to a private company the huge sum of 520,000 Euro. Most of the cases were lost at ECHR because Moldova failed to execute properly judicial decisions, it failed to guarantee a due process, or it infringed on freedom of expression.

The report of the National Centre of Human Rights presented in Parliament on July 13 revealed that social rights, property rights, access to justice, and due process are the fields where the Moldovan judicial system does not meet the European standards. The release of the last political detainees from the Ilascu group occurred with significant human rights abuses. Human rights still cannot be implemented in the separatist area of Transnistria, and even if the Moldovan ombudsman tried to establish relations with his counterpart from Tiraspol, he did not receive any feedback.

The weak human rights record of Moldova was also highlighted in the last Freedom House Report. The democracy score for Moldova remained unchanged (4.96), but this must be interpreted as the absence of progress. According to the Freedom House report, Moldova improved its score for civil society and obtained a worse score for independent media. If there existed a special section for environment in the Freedom House report, Moldova would get one of the lowest scores.

The public authorities' indifference towards environment

It seems that ecology is not a top priority on the political agenda of the current government. Not only is the number of personnel (25 persons) at the Ministry of Environment insufficient when contrasted to the numerous problems facing the environment, but the Moldovan Parliament has literally forgotten about a draft of legislation proposing the 11th of July to be declared the Day of the Nistru river. Eco-Tiras, an international non-governmental organization comprising over 50 environment organizations, expressed its concerns regarding the pollution of the Nistru River and that a series of measures undertaken by the government that would harm the river's ecosystem. This example shows that economic interest is overriding the need

for preserving a clean and healthy environment.

Sustainable development is a phrase that can be found only in the governmental strategies, but not on the field. Even if the National Strategy for Development is discussed, the place of environment on the political agenda is secondary. The construction of the Cahul - Giurgiulești railway track without a prior evaluation of the impact on the environment reminds one of Soviet times, when ecology was hardly an issue. The track is passing through the „Lunca Prutului” natural reservation even if alternative routes existed. Citizens in the region fear that the Government will expropriate their land by force and numerous NGOs protecting the environment protested against the way the project is realized.

Governmental control

Government is trying to extend its control over various spheres of the Moldovan society. The public media continued to reflect the reality in a distorted manner by favoring the Communist government. The recent hearings of Corneliu Mihalache, the president of the Broadcasting Coordinating Council (CCA), revealed the dissatisfaction with the performance of this institution, which was meant to set the rules for the development of free media in Moldova. The CCA was often criticized for being politicized and under control of the Communist Party since its members were approved by a Parliament with a Communist majority.

The independence of the judicial branch is also constantly under pressure. The unexpected release of Valeriu Pasat, former chief of the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS), immediately after the bilateral meetings of Vladimir Voronin with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin shows, according to Pasat's lawyers, that the independence of justice is a mere myth in Moldova. Pasat's lawyers claimed it was due to the direct intervention of President Voronin that Pasat was released.

The institutional framework of the Moldovan democracy is de jure parliamentary, but de facto presidential. Due to the fact that the ruling party has for the second term the majority of the seats in the Parliament, there is no effective system of checks and balances like in a consolidated democracy. The system does not work properly, because the whole state structure is doubled by the Communists



party structure ruled by the president of the state, who did not decline his party membership. Thus, the Presidency in Moldova became the most influential public institution, and many of the reforms initiatives have their origins in the presidential building.

The control of the government extended in July over the trade-unions. The largest trade union in the country, "Solidaritatea," swallowed the Confederation of Trade Unions from Republic of Moldova. It is known that "Solidaritatea" is a trade-union controlled by the Government. Thus, it is not surprising that in the last months in Moldova there were no mass protests of employees, even if the wages were not indexed.

Even if, Church and State are separated and there is no official religion, president Voronin tries to politicize and tighten the control on the Moldovan Orthodox church. It was after the poor results of the last local elections that the President decided to use the Church for political reasons. For that purpose, he convoked at the beginning of July the most important Orthodox Church clerics and pressured them to persuade their followers to vote the Communists, if they do not want their religious competitors to gain ground. According to the press, to support his claims, Voronin even asserted that „Jesus was the first Communist ever”. None of the high officials of the Orthodox Church protested against this interference of the state in its affairs. Communism and religion, incompatible everywhere else, are closely connected in Moldova.

Prognosis

Still, the main challenge for internal political stability is a non-human factor. For an agricultural country like Moldova, the dry weather and its consequences will be the main concerns for the next two months. The dry weather will affect the stability of the whole economy. Irrigation systems cover only 20% of the cultivated territories. The dry weather will affect the agricultural sector, which employs approximately 54% of the population. Mainly small producers will be affected, and prices for agricultural products are already climbing.

Until now, the governmental response to the crisis in agriculture was inadequate: too slow and too symbolic. The Government did not undertake

measures to prevent the crisis. The National Public Procurement Agency announced that it bought only 3400 tones of wheat as compared to the 30 000 tones necessary to complete the state reserves. The government intends to abolish the taxes for the import of wheat and to return a part of the VAT in order to avoid an increase of prices for wheat products. These are chaotic measures, and until now the Moldovan government did not present any coherent strategy to fight the consequences of the dry weather. Instead of that, the prime-minister Vasile Tarlev is already blaming the non-Communist local authorities for the situation and misinterprets the local autonomy by urging them to buy the necessary quantity of cereal crops. In August-September, the situation in agriculture will worsen and will affect the food security of the country.



■ Foreign Policy Sector

BACK TO THE FUTURE - EAST OR WEST?

by Sergiu Panainte

International context

The terrible temperatures, the highest ever for this period of the year, appeared to decrease the level of foreign activity for this month. In the domestic arena, the ruling party continued a criticizing and scapegoating campaign, blaming everybody for its failure in the local elections. On the international stage, it performed poorer.

The fact is explained by the major developments occurring on the global and regional scenes which drew the attention of major international players away from Moldova. The most important event has been the announced suspension by Russian Federation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) and Related International Agreements. While NATO members expressed "regret" and disappointment with regard to this unilateral decision, Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration was able only to articulate its concern about Russia's decision and to wait and see what happens when 150 days deadline for the suspension to enter into force expires.

If this suspension takes action, it means the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict is seriously jeopardized, since Russia will be able to deploy and move its forces along its flanks without any inspection from other parties to the CFE Treaty. Moreover, as Russia continuously stated its will to have a Russian military base in Transnistria, this goal can be achieved easier than ever before. Moldova was the first country to vehemently object against Russia's decision, since the ratification of Adapted CFE Treaty by the NATO members is conditioned upon Russia's fulfillment of Istanbul Agreements that provide for the full withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova and Georgia.

Moldovan authorities will have to deal with dangerous developments in the near future if this suspension is to take place. With Russia regaining power and playing tougher on the international scene, it is expected to do everything possible to preserve the frozen conflict in Transnistria. Such a move would balance a strengthened NATO,

which in 2004 added seven new members from whom two former Warsaw Pact countries of Bulgaria and Romania on the southern flank.

An Old Story: East-West Dilemma

As noted by Dumitru Minzarari in the previous edition of PSS, foreign policy priorities are shifting from West to East, a fact proved by President Voronin's visits to his Russian counterpart Putin and the back-scene negotiations on a draft plan for the resolution of Transnistrian conflict proposed by Chisinau. Thus far Voronin denied all these allegations, stressing that the solution should be found in the "5+2" format and in accordance with the law about the Transnistrian settlement adopted in the summer of 2005.

This is a "weak" excuse formulated by Voronin, who consciously was leading the country into an unfair agreement on the reunification of the country. After its failure all he could do was deny all the speculations on this topic and "reinforce" the myth of actually involving all the negotiators and observers in the talks to find a peaceful solution to the conflict that preserves the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state.

Despite the active shuttle diplomacy of President Voronin to Russia in the last month, in July one may notice a less energetic approach to Moldovan-Russian relations. However, the trend of trying to reach an agreement with Russia, especially on the Transnistrian issue and reopening of Russian markets for Moldovan wine is pending on the Moldovan foreign policy agenda.

With regard to the draft plan on the settlement of the Transnistrian issue, it is obvious President Voronin failed to get Putin's approval, given the fact that Transnistria has been always used as a last resort tool in the negotiations between Moldova and Russia in order to blackmail Moldovan authorities. Putin, appearing more concerned with keeping Moldova under Russia's control and tempering its European aspirations, rejected the plan drafted by Voronin's councilors. Instead,



Putin managed to convince the Moldovan president to abandon the plans to impose an embargo from July 1 on Transnistrian import of rough materials, as the Tiraspol regime is unable to export its goods without Moldovan customs stamps. Putin is aware that isolating Transnistria economically will push the regime into concessions and lose ground in the talks about the final settlement. A similar measure has been undertaken in March 2006, and the results could be seen immediately, as the whole Transnistrian foreign economic activity became paralyzed. The only barrier to implementing such a measure is the Russian restriction on Moldovan wines and agricultural products; otherwise Moldovan authorities would have proceeded with it long before.

Furthermore, the issue of regaining access to Russian markets for the Moldovan wine producers is a big headache for Voronin. Earlier this month the Head of Russian Consumer Service (RosPotrebNadzor) Ghenady Onishchenko announced that 2 companies and than another 3 obtained the right to restart the exports under a complex scheme. However, at a recent press conference (July, 25) President Voronin stated that it would not work out that way. Either all wine producers get the access to Russian market, or none of them. It seems that Voronin does not want to give up this sensitive issue, since it is causing big budget losses. While it is obvious that this continued check on the quality of wine products is an invented story, the prolonged interdiction is meant to economically press Moldovan authorities to concede to Russian demands.

On the other hand, this month President Voronin had several meetings with European officials where the European aspirations of Moldova have been strongly reasserted. During these meetings, President Voronin emphasized the efforts Moldova is undertaking to promote continuous reforms and asked the foreign guests to support in all ways Moldova's integration to the European Union (EU).

The political reality which makes Moldova a direct neighbor of the EU leaves little choice for the Union, which pledged to support each initiative declared by Moldovan authorities on improving the legislation, administrative capacity, reforms, etc. As the stakes made by

the EU are not the ones to push Moldova into a fully-fledged process of "Europeanization" and "modernization," the EU is looking for small steps the government can do within the framework of the EU-Moldova Action Plan. Conversely, Moldova remains entrapped in a policy of European integration which does not conflict in government's opinion with the CIS membership, heavily relying on the Russian Federation on a multiplicity of issues.

Regrettably, however, the Moldovan foreign policy led by President Voronin remains stalled in the process of finding its way in the simultaneously deepening the East-West dilemma. At the last press conference (July 25), the Moldovan head of state frankly stated that Moldova does not deserve the status of an associated member of the EU yet. On Moldovan foreign policy agenda one finds only the EU autonomous commercial preferences and a facilitated visa regime. This leads to the idea Moldova is seeking only unilateral benefits from the relation with the EU, aiming at the "carrots" and avoiding the "sticks". However, with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement ending in 2008, the EU will find ways to condition its trade preferences and make Moldova understand that European integration is not just trade and free movement of persons, but requires a lot of work. In turn Moldovan authorities will have to work a lot in order to reach the required European standard in all the fields.

Of the two top priorities of Moldovan foreign policy after the historical political consensus of April, 4 2005, one is handled within the framework of Moldovan-Russian bilateral relations while other – the prospect of EU integration – remains blurred by the deficient implementation of EU-Moldova Action Plan as well as by ongoing undemocratic practices used by the ruling party and the strong allegiance of Moldovan president to Russia.

Voronin's Counterproductive Attacks on Romania

Historically, bilateral relations with Moldova's Western neighbor have been characterized by ups and downs, from periods of warming to almost freezing. This month President Voronin again criticized Romania on several issues:

(1) for financially supporting the Opposition, which acts destructively and overturned Communists Party plans on solving Transnistrian issue; (2) on the issue of opening Romanian consulates in Balti and Cahul; and (3) by accusing Romania of forcefully imposing Romanian citizenship on Moldovan people, given approximately one million applications reported by the Romanian authorities.

The outcome of these imagined accusations, repeatedly reiterated by Moldovan president, have severely worsened Moldovan-Romanian relations. Deeply unsatisfied with the loss of local elections, Voronin pointed immediately to the opposition financed by Bucharest. Such irrational declarations can only increase the friction between Bucharest and Chisinau, and as such we should expect a prompt response from Romanian authorities.

Voronin's largest concern in relation to Romania is the issue of concluding the Basic Bilateral Treaty between Moldova and Romania, still non-existent from 1991. As some claimed that such proposals were received from Bucharest this month, Voronin did not hesitate to express his Romanophobia once again. The policy approach of President Voronin displays towards Romania is detrimental, for once again Moldova appears incapable of establishing a productive political dialogue with its Western neighbor.

Blaming And Begging: How Good The Strategy Is?

On June, 28 President Voronin addressed the diplomatic corps and criticized Western states for not supporting Moldova in solving its problems in the dispute with Russia on gas prices and interdiction on exporting agricultural products. Later this month, the President again called the diplomatic corps, yet this time he asked the West to help Moldova in overcoming the consequences of the severe drought that gravely affected this year harvest.

Is this a well-thought, consequently and comprehensively promoted foreign policy? After blaming the West for not helping Moldova and appearing to make it responsible for all of Moldova's troubles, Voronin suddenly asks the same Western states for help in decreasing the consequences of the drought. Thus we see that Tarlev's cabinet is helpless, without concrete

solutions to these pressing problems and mired in incompetence. Voronin realizes that he cannot wait for help from Russia, which is liable to gain another lever to control Moldova, besides the Transnistrian issue, already omnipresent in Moldovan-Russian relations. That is why the only solution was to beg for Western support as the situation nears a dramatic one.

Blaming the West is not the right strategy for focusing attention on Moldova; it damages their trust in the country, if it ever existed. One can assume that help will not hesitate to come, but not thanks to Voronin, but rather because Westerners understand that the people are those who will suffer and not decision-makers who promote bankrupt policies. It would be advisable that commitments the ruling party subscribed to with regard to EU and other international organizations and Western partners be put in practice. As soon as there will be a true separation of powers, a free media, an independent judiciary and real civil and political rights, help from the West and access to its various resources will be fully granted.

Prognosis

In the coming month, foreign policy efforts will be mainly directed towards solving the crop crisis caused by the severe drought. It should be expected that Western countries, mainly the EU, would provide assistance and humanitarian aid, as Moldovan diplomacy will be asking for it. Also noteworthy is the fact that president Voronin asked the help of FAO as well, which means that he is on a serious quest for solutions.

We should also expect increased activity in Moldovan-Romanian relations surrounding negotiations and a possible conclusion of the Basic Treaty. This will happen if Bucharest will close the eyes to the ungrounded declarations of President Voronin. If this does not occur, we might foresee a new freezing of bilateral relations between the two states.

On the eastern vector we expect a continued and enhanced set of actions intended to bring closer the views of Chisinau and Moscow over the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. If president Putin keeps his intractable stand, which is more likely to happen, Voronin will face a serious dilemma and will be run out of options since his second presidential mandate was a promise to reintegrate the country.

■ Security Policy Sector

THE FRIGHTENING DEJA VUE – VORONIN HAS LOOKED INTO PUTIN'S EYES

by Dumitru Mînzărari

Mixing up rational with emotions

The heated up spirits, quarrels and tensions are not strange for the Moldovan post-electoral political arena. It is rather amazing that President Voronin, who is not a novice to politics, has reacted so painfully to the opposition's efforts of uniting against his ruling Communists' Party (PCRM). Or, not only the political balance in the country has changed, but also the party he leads was active in upsetting its pre-elections partners through massive misuse of administrative resources and many other steps of doubtful nature. Some other moves of Vladimir Voronin, such as carrying secret negotiations with his Russian counterpart on Transnistria issue, have also sparked concerns among opposition parties. However Moldovan President apparently failed to consider all of this, and instead threatened to cut governmental funding to the local administration authorities controlled by parties other than PCRM. This threat was followed by another one, saying that no state positions will be shared with the opposition.

So why did Vladimir Voronin so strongly confront the opposition in his latest addresses to the public? Was it the poor performance of PCRM in the local elections that caused the President's emotional outburst? Or was he offended by the efforts of the opposition parties to unite everywhere possible, taking control over a significant number of the country's districts? President's emotionalism has become legendary. It looked fancy and patriotic after 2003, when Voronin stated that Moldova would rather freeze without Russian gas, but will not give up its vital interests. Moldova did not freeze that time, but it quietly yielded to the Russian pressure and lost control over what probably was its only strategic asset left - the country's gas distribution network. That made Chisinau completely dependant on the Russian state-controlled Gazprom Company. Even if Moldova manages today to find an alter-

native to the Russian gas, it will not be able to use the distribution pipelines to bring that gas to the consumer without Gazprom's consent. Some other cases of presidential hot-temperedness included the blaming of both Ukraine and Romania at the Giurgiulesti terminal opening ceremony for being unfriendly neighbors. And this happened when Moldova severely needed the support of both countries, facing the imminent danger of Russian political and economic pressures.

Voronin and his notorious presidential administration repeatedly attacked Bucharest and Romanian officials for what they described as "interference into the internal affairs of Moldova", sometimes even echoed in these actions by Moscow. Also, President Voronin's administration has stopped the release of many protest statements by the Moldovan foreign office, drafted in response to the stated support of the separatist leadership in Tiraspol from the top Russian state officials. This behavior of Chisinau was rightly perceived by Moscow as a weakness. So Russia treated Moldova in line with the judgment that one does not negotiate with a weak country. Why would one offer anything in exchange for what can be taken anyway? Ironically, Voronin's core adviser on many important state affairs, including foreign policy, used to be the Dean of an anthropology school. There students are supposedly taught the historical evolution of the Russian political culture.

The recent break up of PCRM with the two opposition parties (Democratic Party and Christian Democratic Popular Party) looks odd and it makes no sense, because PCRM parliamentary group does not hold a majority in the Parliament.. After 2005 elections those two parties have built a partnership with the communists allowing for the Parliament to become a functioning institution. Given some irreconcilable differences among certain parliamentary opposition groups,

it should come at no surprise that the legislative body might find itself unable to pass any law or initiative. This could trigger a crisis, forcing the President of the country to dissolve the Parliament and call for early elections. Or, is this not a similar scenario to the one that was claimed to have been discussed recently with the Kremlin?

Does then Voronin understand the risk of building up tensions and animosities between his party and the opposition, without planning an honorable way out for himself and his domestic opponents? If not, was the person drafting his speech deliberately aiming at such an outcome, thus basically using the president? How does it fit in here the earlier Voronin's request to resign addressed to Speaker Marian Lupu, which reportedly happened shortly after the elections? And how grounded are the claims that the PCRPM parliamentary group is pushing for changes in the country's Electoral Code?

Divided we are safer

If the current Communist leadership led by Vladimir Voronin is indeed eager to provoke the early elections, they probably believe to be in such case better off. It seems there is a confidence among PCRPM that they could get today more votes compared to what they could receive after the 2009 elections. So basically all the ongoing noise is not as much about resolving the Transnistrian conflict, or becoming a EU member, but is a very serious fear of the ruling party about its future. The Communists star seems to be on decline these days. Experiencing a sharp drop in popularity, abandoned by its domestic partners, and facing isolation for the next one and a half year preceding the approaching parliamentary elections, PCRPM is also confronting increasing internal party divisions. The Soviet-minded Communist old guard might just succeed in convincing President Voronin to follow the example of his Uzbek counterpart Islom Karimov. This means he could select the clear terms and conditions of Russia, instead of trying to grasp the EU unclear and fuzzy promises of indeterminate integration timeframe. Some pressure for closer ties with Russia could also come from some local

business elites with ties to Moldovan President and PCRPM, and strong economic interests in Russian Federation.

However, things might not be so easy. It looks like not everyone from PCRPM parliamentary group rejects the idea of cooperation with the opposition. Only a day after President Voronin's speech on 25 July, the Western-educated Speaker Marian Lupu, also a member of PCRPM, has softened communists' leader message. Contradicting Vladimir Voronin he stated that PCRPM should in fact draw the right lessons from its low performance in the elections and continue to cooperate with the opposition. His statement about the need to reform PCRPM, including its name, came also against what Voronin has spoken during his meeting with the Moldovan Orthodox Church clergy. Then, Moldovan president told the clergy that changing the party name is problematic, while it is still very popular, because the abandoned communist banner will be quickly picked up by others. During the same meeting he also asked church representatives to work with their flock in order to increase the support for the Communists among the population.

In fact, there were some fundamental differences in the addresses of Lupu and Voronin, issued at only one day difference. Amazingly, Lupu, himself a PCRPM member, has stressed that the electorate has become more politically mature, and that it cannot be anymore fooled and manipulated, hinting to the methods used by PCRPM during elections. He also acknowledged that the current political set up required even more cooperation between the ruling party and the opposition, if country's priorities of EU integration, conflict resolution and welfare of the people, are to be achieved. To the contrary, President is apparently looking at the opposition parties as if they were subordinated to him and PCRPM, and could be bought off and silenced by offering them some positions in the state structures. While this is the presidential "carrot", the "stick" was also made public – cutting the opposition from the central authorities financing and ignoring their opinion in the state decision making. This is a perspective which resembles better the Russian "managed democracy" than a Euro-

pean-type liberal state.

Lupu insisted that there were more PCRM members, who felt the stringent need to implement changes in the party. This suggests there is a division built up inside PCRM. As long as this exists, and it is not sorted out, Vladimir Voronin and other Communists' Party members will face difficulties in engineering elections before 2009. That means the PCRM internal division may keep a major internal crisis away for a while.

However, a possible governmental decision to reduce the funding of districts that elected non-communist leadership could backfire with significant consequences for the country's stability. Voronin would hardly be able to convince the population that they should blame districts' authorities for the fact that the Communist government has cut them from the central funds. To the contrary, the pressure on his government will be significantly higher, due to the serious draughts that the country is facing. Therefore, any deliberate confrontation among political parties, and the inability to negotiate, will carry a dangerous potential for dividing the already fragmented society. It will bring more dissonance into the activities of the state institutions, decreasing their effectiveness and making them more vulnerable to external pressure.

The two Vladimirs' affair

Emotions and contradictions have marked also the foreign dimension of the Moldovan security policy. Thus, Voronin's phrase that President Putin does not insist on federalization of our country brings some remarkable change into the Russian foreign policy thinking towards Moldova. Furthermore, the other words of Vladimir Voronin about the Russian president could be pretty much summed up to the famous statement of President George Bush, when the latter insisted that he have looked into Putin's eyes, and this convinced him the Russian president was a man to be trusted.

However attractive this idea might be, the facts show the contrary. Putin, according to Voronin, has assured him that the wine problem will be solved and all Moldovan wine companies will be

allowed to trade on Russian markets. Today, Moldovan President found himself quarrelling about this topic with a low level Russian official, named Genady Onishenko. Ironically, some local media has widespread the story that President Putin has called his subordinates immediately after hearing the wine trading problems from President Voronin, during one of their June meetings. Having his government functioning based on strong vertical hierarchy, similar to what the Russian state has built in, would Vladimir Voronin believe that a functionary of Onishenko level would dare not to obey the orders of his superiors? It is rather the usual Russian trick, aiming to force and speed up the concessions on the part of Moldova, in line with what President Voronin has promised to his Russian counterpart during their last direct talks. Again, the fact that the details of the meetings are not known even to the foreign ministry speaks against President Voronin. He denied making any secret deals with Putin, however is refusing to reveal what was the request of the Russian side on Transnistria conflict and what he did accept.

Following the Kosovo issue in the Russian media one makes a clear conclusion that Kremlin is a good student in learning from Western experience. Already some time ago, the media has quoted a Russian political analyst stating that both Moscow and Tiraspol launched into a thorough study of the Kosovo scenario, to draw the necessary lessons and implement them in the resolution of Transnistria conflict. Similar to what pro-Kremlin media has labeled in the Kosovo case "being independent without naming it independence", the rebel region in Moldova could get "federalization without calling it federalization". A secret deal with Russia was leaked to the media, supposedly involving pre-term elections both in Chisinau and Tiraspol. The plan offered Tiraspol appointees a quota in the Parliament and positions in the government, aiming to build just another control mechanism of Kremlin over Moldova.

There are many facts suggesting that the suspected agreement with Russia really exists and stays on agendas both in Moscow and Chisinau. Moldovan President has voiced himself the idea to end the Transnistria issue through simultane-

ous elections on the both banks, without initially trying to build democratic institutions in the rebel region. In fact for many actors this seems to be the only way to make happy both Kremlin and Tiraspol, since it will allow the former to strengthen its control over Chisinau and the latter to stay in power and preserve their illegally made fortune. Current leadership in Chisinau, namely PCRM, will also get the possibility to repair the problem of its popularity before the forthcoming parliamentary elections. It hopes to get a significant number of active pro-Russian voters. How real is this?

Country unification, the Communists' way

On 20 June Anatoly Lokot, a Russian Duma deputy also representing the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) visited Moldova at the request of the CPRF Chairman Genady Zyuganov. He opened the CPRF Chairman's public office in Tiraspol for local inhabitants, aimed at counseling them on the issue of Russian citizenship, and at the same time promoting the party. Lokot stated that the CPRF is today one of the most effective tools of Russian Federation for the Transnistrian conflict resolution, and the new office has "a tremendous political importance" since the influence of communist parties is very significant "both in Moldova and Transnistria". He has met Russian diplomats in Chisinau, the leadership of PCRM, Transnistrian communists and Supreme Soviet in Tiraspol. This Russian communists' landing in Tiraspol seems to have as their goal the building up on the left bank of a stronger communist electorate for the next parliamentary elections in Moldova.

While it is probably too early to make any conclusions, there are two things that draw the attention. Lokot has emphasized that the core problem between Tiraspol and Chisinau is that Transnistria inhabitants "do not see themselves not being a part of Russia", while Moldova strives to join European Union. It is also a fact that there are forces nostalgic for the greatness of the Soviet Union inside the Communists' Party of Moldova. It was them, that Genady Zyuganov mentioned last month as leadership of the PCRM supportive of the idea of rebuilding "what used to be a great country". All this

would explain why many pro-European initiatives get stuck in the PCRM parliamentary group, which makes impossible their discussion in the Parliament sessions. This was the fate of the recently drafted National Security Concept, which was evaluated by the communist members of the Parliament as being excessively pro-Western. They stopped the document from going further, aiming to redraft it before it is presented for wider discussions in the Parliament.

This would not be the only instance when the Communist government has obstructed and even endangered Moldovan interests for various reasons. Their attempts to control the segment of foreign policy involving Russian interests have become anecdotic. The ministries and Moldovan embassies abroad reached the point when they have to confirm with the President's administration even the most basic and routine things, like long-term positions, declarations, interviews and speeches of diplomats and officials. Moldovan institutions are allowed to read out only texts that passed the scrutiny of the presidential administration. Often getting modified to the point they change completely, these texts lack the professional language, and sound weird to foreign counterparts. The micromanagement, un-addressed conflicts of interests, and inefficient use of human resources hinder the development of initiative, creativity and out-of-the-box thinking among public officials, making Moldova vulnerable and weak in its foreign affairs.

Another example showing lack of foresight and thorough analysis is the question of replacement of the Russian so-called peacekeepers. The Moldovan leadership insists to transform the peacekeeping mission, deploying instead a multinational group of civilian observers in Transnistria. However they did not mention how they are going to deal with armed groups currently serving the Tiraspol regime, and reaching numbers higher than the National Army of Moldova. This became extremely crucial when the rebel leader Igor Smirnov has declared recently that the replacement of the Russian peacekeepers will result in violence and bloodshed in the region. And even the international peacekeeping experience proved that only robust mandates, providing the capabilities and clear terms to enforce the agreements, are successful. Ignoring this would put



Moldovan government into the situation when it will continuously appeal to the international community for help to stop illegal paramilitary groups.

Prognosis

The fall will most probably be marked by tensions both inside the PCRM and between the communists and the opposition. The possibility of a systemic crisis either real or artificial, in the form of the Parliament being unable to function properly, increases. The existence of significant discrepancies between the members of the Communists' Party will make it more difficult for PCRM leadership to gather support for their efforts, and could delay a country-wide crisis. The necessity to deal with draughts consequences and resulting panic of people might also serve as a unifying factor in internal politics, if correctly addressed. However the plan to have early elections will still be on the top of the ruling party agenda.

The recent declaration of Voronin that Moldova is not yet ready for the status of EU associated country, as well as rather demonstrative call to the new minister of defense to increase the cooperation with NATO, suggest a stall in the Moldova-West relationship. Instead, Chisinau will channel its efforts to obtain more trade preferences and visa facilitation, to reduce the pressure for EU integration that it receives from country's population. This will allow the Communist ruling party to claim improvement on the EU integration agenda, while in fact not moving a bit further towards European membership.

While private talks around Transnistrian conflict will intensify, some serious break-through is not highly probable. Even though there might be some increased level of low-profile discussions among Chisinau, Tiraspol and Moscow, the West will continue to be the less-informed observer. The reason for this is that Chisinau, disappointed with what it sees the inability of the West to put pressure on Moscow, has chosen instead to play the Russian way. A way, which will attempt to exclude EU and US from the negotiations process, forcing them to face the fait accompli.





The Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDSI) Viitorul is a research, education and outreach organization which activates in the field of economic analysis, governance, law, political sciences, strategic and organizational science. It was set up in June 1993 in Moldova as a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization, non-political entity.

The IDSI's mission is to contribute to the growth of independent thinking environment in Moldova and in other emerging democracies; to contribute to the strengthening of the local and regional governments; to assist the expansion of the civil society in which the citizens act together to express their own interests, to exchange information and to strive for mutual goals and influence government.

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- * processes linked to political transformations in Moldova and other countries of the region,
- * economic analysis and forecast,
- * governance, i.e. local and regional government's technical support and training, and
- * academic research, networking and support in ensuring necessary preconditions for peace, security and cooperation in the region.

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