

DEMOCRATIZATION AND ATTEMPTS TO MODERNIZE THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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INTRODUCTION

In 1991 the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the so-called it ending the “Cold War”. However, as was expected, the collapse of a huge, multinational and multicultural superpower was accompanied by irreversible and dramatic processes, manifested in the ethno-political conflict that broke out in the territory of the former allied republics. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, 15 independent states appeared on the world political map. However, it is debatable to what extent the mentioned entities or the majority of them can be called “new”. Before the creation of the Soviet Union, the allied republics within it were at different stages of statehood development and national identity formation. Within these countries the political processes taking place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which in many cases were led by less competent, though charismatic and popular leaders created a fertile ground for Russia to use some “mines” planted by Russia a long time ago in the polyethnic countries to take action. As a result, hot spots appeared in the post-Soviet space, in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and this time in Ukraine. The war of August 2008, the conflict in Transnistria and the dramatic events in the southeastern regions of Ukraine clearly showed us that the Kremlin’s aspirations continue to threaten the architecture of world peace and security.

Within these countries, post-Soviet states in the late 1980s and early 1990s were often governed by less competent yet charismatic and popular leaders creating fertile ground for Russia to set off long-established landmines in polyethnic regions.

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After regaining independence in 1991 the Republic of Moldova faced the most difficult tasks of simultaneously implementing economic reforms and establishing new democratic political institutions and national identity. Processes of political modernization often developed unnaturally, as in the case of many post-Soviet countries. The reason for this was the fact that Western democratic institutions were mechanically implemented in such transitional societies. They lacked the necessary socio-political, socioeconomic, and ideological prerequisites for forming democratic institutions. Failure to fulfill the state's most difficult tasks has scattered its diverse population culturally in different directions. Despite some successes in some areas, in the first quarter of independence, Moldova could not build a democracy or a functional market capitalist economy. On the contrary, it is rightly placed in hybrid or partially democratic regimes. The main challenges that have hindered Moldova's development since independence have been the lack of institutions through which political leaders can be effectively accountable to their constituents. Without such institutions political parties functioned as clientelistic machines of individual leaders. The weak rule of law created an environment in which lawsuits became a tool through which elite factional disputes were managed and resolved. Corruption, in which the political class was actively involved, became a key to the Moldovan political system¹.

Along with all the problems listed above, the separatist crisis in Transnistria has also become the most critical challenge for Moldova. The formation of a favorable ground for the conflict began in the distant past when the Russian Empire was expanding in the West at the expense of the oppression of the Ottoman Empire. Wars of conquest were followed by mass migration of the Russian-speaking population to occupy new lands, which changed the ethnic balance in the captured territories to the detriment of the local population and the benefit of the Russian Empire. The Soviet Union successfully continued the policy of Tsarist Russia, and as a result of the Second World War, its position in Eastern Europe was further strengthened. It was during this period that Transnistria was formed into a Russian enclave. The collapse of the Soviet Union, accompanied by the rise of nationalism in the conquered nations, created a conflict situation in Transnistria. Moscow which during this period considered conflicts as a lever to maintain its influence on the post-Soviet space actively contributed to the further inflaming of the Transnistria conflict.

¹ Crowther, W., 2023. Moldova's First Quarter Century: Flawed Transition and Failed Democracy. *Nationalities Papers*, 51(1), pp. 33-46.

TRANSITIONAL IMPASSE AND FUTILE ATTEMPT TO BUILD DEMOCRACY

The Republic of Moldova remains a young state, as it had little experience of independent state existence before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The issue of national identity remains one of the problematic issues for the country, which is caused by its historical and geographical development and ethnic-linguistic affiliation. Due to its geographical location, the territory of Moldova was, for the centuries a meeting place of the Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires. Moldova's location made it a historical gateway between Asia and Southern Europe. The central part of the country lying between the Prut and Dniester rivers, was part of Romania, although not infrequently, its individual territories were also included in the Russian Empire. In 1917, after a hundred years of Russian rule, the creation of the independent Democratic Republic of Moldova was announced on the territory of historical Bessarabia, and in 1918, it joined Romania of its own accord. In 1924, the Soviet Republic of Moldova was established on the territory of Ukraine and as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Soviet troops occupied the territory of Moldova in 1940. From that time, due to Stalin's policy, Bessarabia was joined by the eastern bank of the Dniester River (the Moldavian Republic of Transnistria) and modern Moldova was formed².

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Moldova has become one of the poorest post-Soviet countries, which, as expected, faced the issue of identity. In the conditions when the majority of the population had a Romanian identity, the question of Moldova's reunification with Romania became increasingly urgent. Accordingly) Moscow effectively used the results of the policy pursued by the Soviet Union for half a century and, using the Russian-speaking population in Transnistria, contributed to the emergence of the conflict, which ended in a bloody confrontation and the establishment of a separatist regime in Transnistria. Article 11 of the country's constitution adopted in 1994 states, "the Republic of Moldova declares its permanent neutrality. The Republic of Moldova does not accept the presence of foreign military forces on its territory". It was probably a strange, unilaterally declared, and internationally unrecognized neutrality) which could not protect the practically demilitarized Chisinau from threats coming from the occupying Russia. Chisinau has no fighting force and no defense industry. Russian troops stationed in Transnistria have been violating Moldova's constitutional neutrality every day since 1994³.

² Löwenhardt, J., Hill, R.J. and Light, M., 2001. A wider Europe: the view from Minsk and Chisinau. *International Affairs*, 77(3), pp. 605-620.

³ Socor, V., 2007. Russian Troops in Moldova--Main Remaining Obstacle to CFE Treaty Ratification. *EuroJournal. org-Journal of Foreign Policy of Moldova*, (03).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transitional legislative elections of 1990 handed power to the members of the “Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova”, which was focused on change. Mircea Snegur, a reformist member of the political establishment, was elected president of the Republican Supreme Council in 1990. A former official of the Communist Party, he supported the independence of Moldova from the Soviet Union and actively sought its recognition from the West. On August 27, 1991 Moldova declared its independence. However, Snegur’s opposition to immediate unification with Romania brought him into conflict with the “Popular Front” of Moldova, so he decided to run as an independent candidate in the December 1991 presidential elections. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova scheduled presidential elections of the Republic of Moldova on December 8, 1991, in which Snegur won with 98.22% of the vote⁴.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the European Union began to review its policy towards the republics of the former Soviet Union. First in 1993 and then in 1994, the president of Moldova, Mircea Snegur, addressed letters to the presidents of the Council of Europe and the European Commission, in which he expressed regret that Moldova was the only state in Eastern and Central Europe that did not have defined relations with the European Union. As a result of the negotiations, an agreement was reached between the European Union and Moldova on the PCA, signed in 1994, which provided a framework for developing political dialogue, trade, and investment and laid the foundation for cooperation between Moldova and the European Union. The PCA came into force in 1998. In addition, Moldova was the first CIS member state to join the Council of Europe in 1994⁵.

In 1996, during Petru Lucinschi’s presidency, Moldova officially announced its desire to join the European Union. In 1999, the integration into the European Union was formally declared as the main priority of Moldova’s foreign policy, further developed as the concept of European integration of the Republic of Moldova. In addition, as a result of the active cooperation and work of the Moldovan government, in 1992, Moldova became a member state of the United Nations, as well as a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. In 1996 a temporary trade agreement was signed between the European Union and Moldova, which entered into force in 1998.

⁴ Decision No. 722-XII of September 19, 1991 of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.

⁵ Korosteleva, E., 2010. Moldova’s European Choice: ‘Between Two Stools’?. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62(8), pp. 1267-1289.

Moldova's transition to democracy was initially difficult due to an ineffective parliament, the absence of a new constitution, a separatist movement (led by the Gagauz minority in the south of the country) and unrest in the Transnistria region. The new constitution adopted in July 1994 eased the conflict with the minority by granting local autonomy. It is interesting that in 2016, in one of the interviews, the ex-president of Moldova, Mircea Snegur, admitted that the real reason for the escalation of the conflict was his refusal to sign the "alliance agreement" with Russia. He recalled his unpleasant conversation in the first half of 1991 with Mikhail Gorbachev and the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the USSR, Anatoly Lukyanov⁶. When Gorbachev heard Snegur's position, he rudely said, "So you know, you will get two additional republics in Gagauzia and Transnistria".

During this period the Law on Language in Moldova established the Moldovan language as the only state language, which helped to expand its use in the educational and public sectors. In particular, the mentioned decision caused aggression and protest in Transnistria, where the mostly Russian-speaking population lived, who considered all this as a threat to them. However, it is interesting to note that in the same year, a poll conducted in Moldova showed that only 5% of Moldovans wanted the unification of Moldova and Romania into one state⁷. Accordingly, the opinions of Russian and Transnistrian politicians or political scientists that the Moldovan society was obsessed with the idea of restoring "Greater Romania" and that the population of Transnistria, in case of remaining under Chisinau, expected total and forced assimilation, are (were) less convincing.

The armed confrontation between the pro-Dniester forces (in whose conflict units of the Russian 14th Army helped) and the pro-Moldovan troops, which started in 1990, ended in the so-called the creation of the unrecognized, de facto independent "state" of Transnistria, after which the situation froze in its current state and remains to this day⁸. Since mid-1991, the unresolved Transnistrian separatist issue has been constantly on the agenda of both domestic and foreign policy in Moldova, shaping Moldova's political evolution. Consequently, the pro-Russian separatist state is still a kind of leverage for Russia, which the Kremlin has been using all this time and is still actively using to hinder Moldova's push towards the West.

⁶ Первый президент Молдовы Мирча Снегур: Телеканал ДОЖДЬ, <https://es-la.facebook.com/tvrain/posts/10154146003543800/> [L.S 01.13.2022].

⁷ Marian, Bozhesku., *Transnistria 1989-1992*, 2008, pp. 15.

⁸ *Diplomacy in Action*, U.S Department of State, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/moldova/34504.htm> [accessed on: 12.13.2023].

„RETURN TO THE SOVIET UNION”

After the restoration of independence the decline in support of the main center-left force, the “Democratic Agrarian Party of Moldova (PDAM), was primarily caused by conflicts between political leaders who controlled the completely insufficiently transparent privatization process that began in the country’s economy. Accordingly, they opened a space for the communists to expand their political influence. Moldova’s political and economic instability, especially between 1991 and 2000, and the frequent change of governments in 2001 contributed to the country’s crisis.

On July 21, 2000, the parliament passed an amendment to the constitution that transformed Moldova from a presidential form of government to a parliamentary republic in which the president was to be elected by three-fifths of the votes of the parliament rather than directly by the people. Slogans like “Return to the USSR” marked the triumphant victory of the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) in the February 2001 parliamentary elections. After the arrival of Vladimir Voronin as the head of Moldova, the foundations of one-party hegemony and almost ten years of defacto presidential rule were laid in the Republic of Moldova⁹. The endless political conflict and the country’s long-term economic decline have awakened a nostalgic mood for the Soviet Union in the population; therefore, in the current situation, Vladimir Voronin was able to successfully create (create successfully) a kind of enemy image among the citizens in the form of those opposition politicians who, according to him, wanted to unite Moldova with Romania.

The results of the parliamentary elections of February 2001 in Moldova can be evaluated as a kind of failure of the government that came after the restoration of independence. This was confirmed by the fact that in the parliamentary elections of February 25, 2001, only three political entities out of 31 political parties won more than 6% of the votes needed to win mandates in the parliament. The marginalized PCRM “Communist Party of Moldova” returned to power with 49.9% of the votes, while the support rate of the ruling parties dropped sharply¹⁰. Accordingly, the Communists won 71 out of 101 parliamentary mandates. In March 2001, the Central Committee of the PCRM presented Voronin as a presidential candidate to the plenum, and on April 4, 71 out of 89 deputies of the parliament voted for Voronin’s candidacy, and he was elected as the country’s president. Moldova turned

⁹ Kuzio, T., 2002. Back to the USSR; Russia Helps Moldova Follow Belarus’ Lead. *Jamestown Foundation Prism*, 8(3), p. 31-33.

¹⁰ Moldova, Parliamentary Elections, 25 February 2001: Final Report, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/moldova/14837> [accessed on: 11.11.2019].

out to be the first state in the post-Soviet space in which the marginalized Communist Party returned to the head of the country.

The central policy of the new communist government aimed at a significant transformation of the post-Soviet reforms. An example of this was Voronin's attempt to declare the Russian language a second language and administrative reforms, which was accompanied by the deepening of Moldova's economic relations with the Russian Federation. This decision caused internal tension in the country and concern for the international community, which represented the beginning of Voronin's authoritarian regime. During the first period of his administration, the legislative body of Moldova recognized the special status of the Russian language and ratified the bilateral agreement with the Russian Federation. Thus, Russia was named as a mediator and guarantor of the Transnistrian settlement. The Voronin government quickly consolidated power by establishing control over the judiciary, restricting press freedom, and strengthening central control over local government. At the same time, there was an immediate renationalization of the economy (such as the cases of the Belgian hotel "Dacia" (2003) and the pharmaceutical company "Farmaco" (2002). Legality of sales of companies to foreign investors (Spanish-owned electric power company Unión Fenosa)¹¹.

The threat of the consequences of Russification and the return of the authoritarian practices of the Soviet era gave rise to a growing wave of protests in the country led by the nationalist Christian Democratic National People's Party (PPCD). Moldova's political class has become polarized between the opposition spectrum and supporters of President Voronin and his "Communist Party of Moldova". Nevertheless, President Voronin was not going to back down; the "Communist Party of Moldova" government actively used the tools typical of an authoritarian regime to neutralize political opponents. Internal tensions and pressure from the international community finally convinced President Voronin of the need to change his political course. He resumed Western-sponsored economic reforms to restore access to international credit, significantly improving the country's financial situation¹².

As new parliamentary elections approached in 2005, a growing and consistent opposition wing began to form in the country. Left and right-wing parties united against the communists and created the "Moldovan Democratic Bloc". These forces opposed the Voronin regime as a pro-Russian and anti-democratic regime. To maintain power, the "Communist Party" moved to a solid pro-Western position, both in domestic

¹¹ March, L., 2004. Socialism with unclear characteristics: The Moldovan communists in government. *Demokratizatsiya*, 12(4), pp. 507-524.

¹² Crowther, W., 2023. Moldova's First Quarter Century: Flawed Transition and Failed Democracy. *Nationalities Papers*, 51(1), pp. 33-42.

and foreign policy. The change in orientation occurred not only in response to domestic competition but also due to the sharp deterioration of relations with the Russian Federation. In 2003, President Voronin refused to sign a memorandum proposed by the Russian Federation on the principles of creating a unified state, also known as the “Kozak Memorandum”¹³. This memorandum was aimed at the federal arrangement of Moldova, which, according to the Russian Foreign Ministry, would solve the problem of Transnistria. The derailment of the memorandum also led to the last-minute cancellation of President Putin’s planned trip to Chisinau, sharply worsening Chisinau-Kremlin relations. The leader of Moldova began a dramatic move from Moscow to the West. Vladimir Voronin has ignored election promises to remain in close ties with Russia and refrained from military cooperation with the West.

It is noteworthy that after the victory of the Communist Party, the European Union did not change its attitude towards Moldova and continued to help and support it. The head of the delegation of the European Parliament, Elizabeth Schroeder, evaluated the cooperation between the EU and Moldova as follows: “There is a stable majority in the parliament. The foreign policy has remained unchanged. A strong political desire exists for EU integration and rapprochement with European structures. In this context, Moldova has a chance to continue on the path of EU integration”¹⁴. As a result, in 2001, Moldova became a member of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe and the World Trade Organization (WTO). In 2004, Moldova also became a participant in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). In 2005, negotiations on an Action Plan (AP) within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) were completed. The culmination of all this was represented by the adoption of significant institutional, legislative and political reforms in 2008. As a result, the EU became Moldova’s leading trading partner. It accounted for 50.2% of Moldova’s foreign trade.

The strategic change of the “Communist Party of Moldova” in 2005 put Moldova on a less aggressive and more pro-European course. President Vladimir Voronin proposed a more reformist agenda to the opposition leaders in the parliament for the second term of the presidency. Despite the positive changes in the country’s foreign policy, Moldova still faced such unresolved problems as lack of accountability, lack of rule of law, and growing corruption at all levels of government. Moldova, which had made some progress in reducing poverty remained one of the poorest countries in Europe. The rate of foreign direct investment, which was a necessary condition for

¹³ Reported Transnistria deal is unlikely Oxford Analytica, European Parliament, 2007, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/d-md20070911_04/d-md20070911_04en.pdf [accessed on: 01.16.2021].

¹⁴ Skvortova, A., 2003. Country Report Moldova. In *Prospects and Risks Beyond EU Enlargement: Eastern Europe: Challenges of a Pan-European Policy* (pp. 147-176). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

the country's economic development, remained low due to the high rate of corruption and the absence of the rule of law. Due to the lack of opportunities in their own country, the emigration rate among young Moldovans was increasing. About 600,000 to one million Moldovans, or a third of the working population were abroad; remittances from abroad accounted for 36% of GDP in 2008¹⁵.

The pre-election promise of the leader of the "Communist Party of Moldova" was also the additional privatization announced in support of the development of the free market, while, in fact, its goal was to maintain control over the state. The fundamental goal of the privatization announced by Voronin was the transfer of state wealth to the ruling politicians and their allies. During Voronin's rule and under previous rulers, valuable assets ended up in the hands of individuals closely connected to the ruling party. Access to leading politicians was vital for high-level business operators, because of the state's regulatory power and political control over the judiciary. The party had established a cooperative, clientelistic relationship with the business sector. At the head of this was the Executive Director of FinComBank, one of the most famous businessmen in the country and, at the same time, Voronin's son – Oleg Voronin.

Despite the control of the "Communist Party of Moldova" over the state institutions, the antagonism towards the government gradually became stronger and stronger. President Voronin failed to resolve the Transnistrian conflict and his confrontation with the Putin regime worsened Chisinau-Kremlin relations, compounded by rampant corruption.

Based on the experience of the success of the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, Moldovan activists launched a massive mobilization before the April 2009 legislative elections. Out of the three opposition parties that won the parliamentary elections held in this agitated political environment, all three refused to enter the legislative body. After the parliamentary elections of April 5, 2009, the Communist Party won 49.48% of the votes, the Liberal Party (PL) 13.14%, the Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) 12.43%, and the Alliance "Moldova Noastră" 9.77% (AMN)¹⁶. Consequently, PCRM failed to elect the country's president in an agitated environment. None of the candidates was able to get the 61 votes required for election. Therefore, the candidate of the Communist Party – Zinaida Greceanîi, was not elected to the post of president.

¹⁵ Parmentier, F., 2010. Moldova, a major European success for the Eastern Partnership. *Questions d'Europe*, 186, pp. 12-17.

¹⁶ International Election Observation Mission Parliamentary Election, Republic of Moldova – 5 April 2009, <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/election-observation/election-observation-statements/moldova/statements-16/2105-2009-parliamentary-april/file> [accessed on: 04.05.2023].

On April 6, 2009, several non-governmental organizations and opposition parties began organizing protests in Chisinau, widely using anti-communist and pro-Romanian slogans. The wave of protest spread widely on social networks, including Twitter and Facebook¹⁷. The participants of the rally accused the communist government of falsifying the election results. On April 7, the demonstration turned into civil unrest and rioting when some citizens attacked the president's residence and stormed the parliament building. Police regained control on the night of April 8, arresting several hundred protesters. This confrontation resulted in human casualties, which the OSCE and other international organizations condemned. Government representatives, including President Vladimir Voronin, assessed the current protest as an attempt at a Coup d'état and accused Romania of organizing it. Voronin expelled the Romanian ambassador from the country, and he did the same to the Moldovan ambassador to Romania. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania assessed Voronin's action as a provocation. "It is unacceptable that the communist authorities in Chisinau place the responsibility for the internal problems of Moldova on Romania and its citizens"¹⁸. The opposition forces accused the government of organizing riots and planting agent provocateurs among the rally participants.

After two unsuccessful attempts by the Communist Party to elect the country's President, the parliament was dissolved on June 15, 2009, and new parliamentary elections were scheduled for July 29. Before the dissolution of the parliament, another amendment was made to the electoral legislation, according to which the electoral threshold was lowered from six to five percent. The opposition expressed concern about the legislative changes, as they believed that the changes in the law were introduced in the previous parliament to help the "Christian-Democratic People's Party," an ally of the Communist Party so that the latter could overcome the electoral barrier and gain mandates in the Parliament. It was during this period that the leading figure of the Communist Party and the former Speaker of the Parliament, Marian Lupu, left the "Communist Party of Moldova" and became the leader of the "Democratic Party of Moldova," which failed to pass the electoral threshold in the April 2009 elections.

As a result of the early elections, the legislative representation of the PCRM was reduced to 48 seats. "Liberal-Democratic Party" won 18 mandates, "Liberal Party" – 15, the Democratic Party – 13, and "Our Moldova Alliance" – 7¹⁹. The last four parties

¹⁷ Parmentier, F., 2010. Moldova, a major European success for the Eastern Partnership. *Questions d'Europe*, 186, pp. 12-17.

¹⁸ Iarovoi, A., Albert J., Smargiassi, L., Republic of Moldova: Transition From Communism to Democracy, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/05/16/republic-moldova-transition-communism-democracy/> [accessed on: 01.16.2021].

¹⁹ Republic of Moldova Early Parliamentary Elections 29 July 2009 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/39799.pdf> [accessed on: 20.09.2023].

united in a coalition – Alliance for European Integration”; in total, the coalition held 53 mandates in the Parliament, thus the parliamentary majority. On September 11, 2009, the President of Moldova – Vladimir Voronin, was forced to resign. According to the Constitution of Moldova, Mikhail Ghimpu, as the Speaker of the Parliament, became acting until the election of a new President. Therefore, the defeat of the Voronin regime ended the PCRM’s decade-long rule through popular mobilization and the unification of opposition forces and raised expectations among the public that the country would finally move on to new tracks of building democratic progress²⁰. The AEI Coalition has publicly committed itself to Western integration and major reforms on its agenda since its inception. The “Alliance for European Integration” came to power with great noise and fuss; they announced that they would reform the government of Moldova and revive the country’s economy. As a result of many years of negotiations, in 2009, Moldova became a member of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), which aims to promote the building of democracy within the country, the creation and encouragement of peace and civil institutions, which should “prepare” the country interested in membership for the European Union. On April 28, 2014, Moldova signed a visa-free regime with Europe and later signed the AA/DCFTA. Moldova’s signing of the Association and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the European Union is a strategic political act to realize Moldova’s European choice²¹. The signing of the AA is considered a historic day for the Republic of Moldova, which took political and legal relations between the two sides to a new level and replaced the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1994. In this way, the country firmly committed itself to democratic reforms and European cooperation.

Despite official support for Western-sponsored reform programs, AEI leaders and ruling parties, like their predecessors, served the interests of powerful oligarchs who gained control over a significant portion of the country’s economy. Clientelistic relationships and related networks governed the relationship between the private and public sectors. Appointments to public offices, including the judicial and police systems, electoral and financial supervision, and banking regulation, were made based on private deals between party leaders.

The case of bank fraud, the so-called bank fraud, was a result of a country weary of unemployment, mass emigration of the population, political scandals, and many years of corruption. “Fraud of the Century”. It was later revealed that in 2014, USD 1 billion

²⁰ European Court of Human Rights, Grand Chamber. The case „Thanase V. Moldova”, Council of Europe/European Court of Human Rights, 2010, <https://electionjudgments.org/en/entity/wbda42fvjgc> [accessed on: 04.02.2020].

²¹ Galben, M., IPN Top events of 2014: the Moldova-EU Association Agreement, https://www.ipn.md/en/top-events-of-2014-the-moldova-eu-association-agreement-7978_1017409.html [accessed on: 26.08.2023].

disappeared from Moldova's three largest banks: Banca de Economii, Unibank and Banca Socială, which at the time held about a third of the country's assets, which was 15% of Moldova's annual gross domestic product²². This event caused public anger and massive demonstrations in the streets of the country's big cities. The political class has consistently denied involvement in these cases. However, several prominent figures, including former parliamentarians and members of the government, have been indicted and some have been convicted in absentia of fraud and money laundering. The mentioned criminal actions, such as theft of state funds, fraud and money laundering, naturally indicated the collaboration of the public authorities of the time in the mentioned criminal actions, which leading Moldovan politicians carried out in cooperation with Russian organized crime groups²³. The so-called "billion dollar bank theft" left taxpayers in an impoverished country increasingly accountable and responsible for the lost funds of banks to prevent bank defaults (The Economist 2015)²⁴. The protests organized around these problems later became decisive for the success of the new civil platform, one of whose leaders, Maia Sandu, became the Prime Minister of the country, and after the President of Moldova.

CONCLUSION

The desire for fundamental political changes in Moldova became evident after the election of Maia Sandu as the country's president in 2020 and the coming to power of the pro-Western political force "Solidarity and Action Party." After receiving the EU candidate status, Moldova has to go through an essential process of reforms, which is called the criteria of the European Union, the aim of which is to bring the candidate countries closer to the EU legislation, rules, and principles.

Moldova is a relatively young democracy. A democracy that has inherited a heavy burden from the Soviet past. Moldova is facing significant challenges today; internal and external factors continue to hinder its transformation from a hybrid regime to a consolidated democratic state. Moscow uses many tried and tested methods to maintain control over Chisinau, be it energy blackmail, adversarial messages in the media, manipulation of minority issues, connections with local governments, difficulties in dealing with the number of migrants, and others. The current government of Moldova inherited a country facing economic, social, and political problems. First of all, the deep-rooted

²² Europe's Forgotten Corruption Heaven: Moldova, Cifar, https://cifar.eu/moldova_corruption/ [accessed on: 01.01.2024]].

²³ Europe 's Forgotten Corruption Heaven: Moldova, Cifar, https://cifar.eu/moldova_corruption/ [accessed on: 01.01.2024].

²⁴ Kosárová, D. and Ušiak, J., 2017. The Republic of Moldova as a Potential Failing State?. *Journal of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University*, 4(3-4), pp. 50-53.

corruption in the field of political life and the influential oligarchic and clan system, which, according to Maya Sandu, led the country to a deep crisis. Today, when democracy retreats in Hungary and Poland, Moldova is a kind of “bright spot” in Europe. The anti-corruption and reformist discourse of the “Action and Solidarity Party in Moldova” brought a clear victory in the parliamentary elections. However, it is difficult to predict how successful PAS’s commitment to change and reform will be. To achieve a certain degree of success, it is not enough to carry out specific structural reforms, at the same time, it is necessary to change the culture of citizenship, which requires much more time and effort from both the government and civil society.

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DEMOCRATIZATION AND ATTEMPTS TO MODERNIZE THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Abstract

Today, when democracies are retreating worldwide and authoritarian regimes are becoming more and more repressive, Moldova is emerging as a “bright spot” in Europe. Despite economic and political challenges, democracy continues to grow in the country. Russia is trying to use different types of leverage to punish Moldova for its pro-European position. This article's purpose is to evaluate Moldova's political evolution after independence in the post-Soviet period. Although the country has gone through completely different stages of governance since independence, the main factors that

hindered the attempt to establish a democratic regime in Moldova were the country's precarious position in the international system, weak state institutions, a lack of rule of law and a profound rupture with national identity, which was further exacerbated by (S) systemic corruption deeply rooted in the country was aggravating. Moscow actively used the Transnistria conflict for years to limit Moldova's pro-Western aspirations.

Keywords: Republic of Moldova, oligarchic political system, post-soviet country, Transnistria, systemic corruption

DEMOKRATYZACJA I PRÓBY MODERNIZACJI SYSTEMU POLITYCZNEGO W REPUBLICIE MOŁDAWII

Streszczenie

Dziś, gdy demokracje na całym świecie się cofają, a reżimy autorytarne stają się coraz bardziej represyjne, Mołdawia wyłania się jako „jasny punkt” w Europie. Pomimo wyzwań gospodarczych i politycznych demokracja nadal rozwija się w tym kraju. Rosja próbuje wykorzystać różne rodzaje nacisków, aby ukarać Mołdawię za jej proeuropejskie stanowisko. Celem tego opracowania jest ocena ewolucji politycznej Mołdawii po uzyskaniu niepodległości w okresie postsowieckim. Chociaż kraj przeszedł przez zupełnie inne etapy rządów od czasu uzyskania niepodległości, głównymi czynnikami, które utrudniały próbę ustanowienia demokratycznego reżimu w Mołdawii, były niepewna pozycja kraju w systemie międzynarodowym, słabe instytucje państwowe, brak rządów prawa i głębokie zerwanie z tożsamością narodową, które zostało dodatkowo pogłębione przez zakorzenioną w tym kraju korupcję systemową. Moskwa aktywnie wykorzystywała konflikt naddniestrzański przez lata, aby ograniczyć prozachodnie aspiracje Mołdawii.

Słowa kluczowe: Republika Mołdawii, oligarchiczny system polityczny, państwo postsowieckie, Naddniestrze, korupcja systemowa

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