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## REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: EASTERN PARTNERSHIP'S NEW HOPE

Dorin Dusciac\*

### ABSTRACT

Contemporary Republic of Moldova is part of the Romanian ethnical and cultural space. The territory is a recent geopolitical construct, a consequence of the Soviet invasion of Romania (1940) and of further territorial "adjustments". Within its actual borders, Moldova gained its independence from Russia in 1991. From the very early days, the newly independent republic was subjected to internal separatist movements supported by Russian military aggression (1992). In the last two decades the Republic of Moldova traversed a very profound economic and social crisis resulting in a sharp decrease of living standards and a massive emigration of an impoverished population in search for material stability. In its foreign policy, Moldova has constantly oscillated between the allegiance to the Community of Independent States and the path of European integration. Solid progress in the European integration process has been achieved in recent years (2009-present), after the fall of the Communist rule (2001-2009). In the light of recent developments, it seems that the geopolitical balance inclines West-wards, as a means for the Republic of Moldova to regain its natural European destiny and thus re-integrate its cultural and ethnic Romanian space.

**Key words:** Republic of Moldova, CIS, emigration, Diaspora, corruption, economic crisis, separatist movements, Transnistria

### 1 Introduction – Historical considerations

The starting point in the history of the principality of Moldova is considered to be 1359 – a moment which marks the formation of a medieval state situated between the Carpathian Mountains to the West and to the North, the Nistru River to the North and to the East, and the Romanian Plain, the Danube River and the Black Sea to the South. During the next several centuries, the history of medieval Moldova has found its definition through a continuous fight for survival, in a geopolitical realm dominated by its strong neighbours: the Ottoman Empire, the Polish Kingdom, the Magyar Kingdom, the

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Habsburg Empire, or, later, the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian Empires. At the same time, from its very beginnings, the principality of Moldova shared a common linguistic and cultural development with two other neighbouring principalities: Wallachia and Transylvania (Panaitescu, 1990, p. 95).

The three countries, usually called “the three Romanian principalities” by historians, have been united several times since the Late Middle Ages until our days. The first unification of the three Romanian principalities has occurred in the year 1600, under the reign of **Mihai the Brave**. It lasted for only several months – by the end of 1600 the neighbouring empires have reinstalled their domination over each of the three principalities. The second unification of two of the three Romanian principalities occurred in 1859. **Alexandru Ioan Cuza**, the elected Prince of Moldova, is encouraged to run for the throne of Wallachia. Taking advantage from a generally favourable international context, namely France strongly supporting the unification of the two Romanian principalities, the Wallachian Nobles’ Assembly (in charge of electing the Prince) votes in favour of Cuza’s election as Prince of Wallachia. Thus, the same person became the ruler of the two principalities, and a new state – The United Romanian Principalities – was born. It should be mentioned here that several decades before its unification with Wallachia, the principality of Moldova has undergone several divisions. In 1775 its Northern province (called Bukovina) is annexed by the Austrian Empire, and becomes part of the Galician province (part of Eastern Austria) (Nistor, 1991, p. 51). In 1812, after the Russo-Turk War of 1806-1812, the Eastern part of Moldova, situated between the Rivers of Nistru and Prut, is annexed by the Russian Empire, which called it Bessarabia (Scurtu, 2010, p. 32). In 1813, Bessarabia becomes a province (*gubernia*) of the Russian Empire. Under this name was known before only the Southern part of this territory which during the 15<sup>th</sup> century belonged to the principality of Wallachia (Basarab was then the name of the ruling family of Wallachia) and the Russians, who few years prior to 1812 declared that they will stop their expansion on the Nistru River, tried to mislead the international community by giving the impression that they are annexing only a small territory. As a consequence of these successive amputations, at the moment of its unification with Wallachia in 1859, the principality of Moldova constitutes only about 40% of the territory and a little over 50% of the population of the medieval principality of Moldova, as it existed before 1775 (Boldur, 1992, p. 264). For a brief period of time, in the aftermath of the Crimean War, in 1856 the Southern part of Bessarabia is re-united with the principality of Moldova. Only 22 years later, in 1878, the emerged state of

Romania (resulted from the Union of Moldova and Wallachia), is forced to renounce to these districts of Southern Bessarabia. These territories are re-integrated into the Bessarabian *gubernia*, under Russian rule (Barbulescu, 2007, p. 134)<sup>1</sup>.

The United Romanian Principalities gained their independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877. Several years later, in 1881, the country changes its name into the Kingdom of Romania. The end of World War I finds Romania in a very favourable international context, as the surrounding empires are disintegrating one by one. The Russian Empire is dissolved after the 1917's February Revolution that has put an end to the Russian absolute monarchy of the Tsars. The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 plunges Russia into a profound crisis followed by the Civil War (1918-1921). The former Russian *gubernia* lying at the periphery of the former Empire gains the right to self-determination, proclaimed by Lenin immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution. Making use of this right to self-determination, the leading elite of Bessarabia opts for the unification of this territory with the Romanian Kingdom. On March 27<sup>th</sup> 1918, the Council of the Country (*Sfatul Tarii*) – an elected body formed by representatives of the people of Bessarabia – proclaims the end of the Russian domination over the territory, and its re-unification with its Motherland, Romania (Scurtu, 2003, p. 121). In the same period, the Austro-Hungarian Empire undergoes a complex but very rapid process of decomposition, as most of the national minorities within the Empire proclaim their independence by the end of the war in November 1918. Following the example of other nations, the Romanians living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire proclaim their freedom from the dominating rule. On November 28<sup>th</sup> 1918, Bukovina, the Northern part of the medieval Moldovan principality, proclaims its re-attachment to the national territory, and becomes part of the Kingdom of Romania. Several days later, on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1918, Transylvania proclaims its unification with Romania. The process of the Romanian re-unification is therefore completed, and Greater Romania will become during the following two decades one of Europe's democratic states, more prosperous than Portugal or Greece.

The beginning of World War II in 1939 puts an end to the national

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<sup>1</sup> Several decades later, in 1944, this part of Southern Bessarabia, which returned to Romania between 1856 and 1878, is incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, as an expression of a Machiavellian ethnic policy conducted by Stalin in the occupied territories.

Romanian state. In fact, the Soviet-Nazi non-aggression pact signed in 1939 between **Ribbentrop** and **Molotov**, contains a secret additional protocol, providing for the division of “regions of interest and control” between USSR and Germany. According to this secret protocol, the Baltic States, together with the Eastern part of Poland, the Northern part of Bukovina and Bessarabia, become part of the Soviet “sphere of influence”. These territories are soon simply annexed to the Soviet Union, despite all international law and diplomatic practice existing at that time. Thus, on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1940, less than 22 years after its re-unification with Romania, Bessarabia is once again part of the Russian empire (this time the Empire is called “USSR”). In order to regain its Eastern territories, Romania enters World War II in 1941 in an alliance with Nazi Germany. Following the German invasion of the USSR (started on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1940), Bessarabia is once again part of Romania. This will last until August 1944, when the province is annexed by the USSR. This time, Russian occupation will last for over 4 decades and will be accompanied by a strong russification of the Romanian-speaking population (Cioranescu, 1993, p. 197). The former Bessarabian province is once again amputated: its Northern and Southern parts are annexed to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The rest of the territory, together with 5 districts on the left bank of the Nistru River<sup>2</sup>, is transformed into the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR).

On August 27<sup>th</sup> 1991, as a result of the national awakening of the Moldovan Romanians, the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic becomes an independent state, under the name of Republic of Moldova. Even before its independence, Moldova is facing serious territorial problems: in early 1990 two “autonomous republics” are proclaimed on the territory of MSSR: the “Gagauz republic” in the South, and the “Transnistrian Moldavian Republic” in the East, on the left bank of the Nistru River. The proclamation of these two autonomous republics is strongly supported by Russia, and the separatist movements very rapidly become the main obstacles on the way of economic and social development of the newly-independent state (Deleu, 2005, p. 68).

The Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova states very clearly the objective of a further re-unification of Romania. Thus, according to this founding document, the Moldovans are recognised as part of the Romanian

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<sup>2</sup> Part of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, created by Stalin in 1924 on the Eastern bank of the Nistru River, as an outpost of the USSR in its military ambition towards Romania.

nation, speaking the Romanian language and traditionally belonging to the Romanian cultural area. This perspective is not acceptable for pro-Russian forces, and they react by giving birth to separatist, reactionary political movements. The situation becomes extremely tense, as the separatists neglect completely the rule of constitutional law of the Republic of Moldova. In early 1992, several months after having proclaimed its independence and stated its perspective towards the re-unification with Romania, the Republic of Moldova is facing a civil war against the Transnistrian separatists, heavily supported by the Russian Federation. After several months of military confrontation, a ceasefire agreement is signed between the Moldovan and the Russian Presidents, putting an end to direct military operations, but keeping intact the situation regarding the positions occupied by the separatists on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Until our days, the Eastern districts of Moldova are controlled by the separatist authorities, the "Transnistrian republic" is not recognised by any state in the world, but continues to be heavily supported by the Russian Federation. Meanwhile, three Southern districts obtained the status of Administrative Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (1995).

It is generally accepted today that the beginning of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century may be characterised as a period when Moldova's re-unification with Romanian became a valid possibility. The national awakening in recent years (1988 – 1991) led to the re-instalment of traditional Romanian values in the Moldovan society. The Republic of Moldova was regaining possession of its centuries-old Romanian identity. It seemed that democratic, anti-communist forces that have gained the power through democratic elections in 1990 have come to a national consensus, regarding the inevitable re-unification with Romania. Nevertheless, this re-unification did not happen. On one hand, the Russian aggression in Transnistria against the newly independent state has put an end to many political leaders' hopes of a true autonomous rule in Moldova. The military conflict of 1992 showed all the stakeholders in the region that the Kremlin was not about to give up its old imperialistic reflexes. On the other hand, the new Romanian authorities that came into power after the December 1989 Revolution did not have a clearly expressed position regarding a possible re-unification with the Republic of Moldova. Some historians and politicians that were visible in that period argue today about some talks between Chisinau and Bucharest authorities, regarding the re-unification. Nevertheless, top political leaders – Moldovan and Romanian Presidents in office in 1991, **Mircea Snegur** and **Ion Iliescu** – always denied the existence of such negotiations. It is

important to note here that after the reversal of the Communist rule in 1989, Romania was the only ex-socialist country to sign a Treaty with the USSR (April, 1991) (Weiner, 2004, p. 468). According to this controversial treaty, Romania would not join any military alliance, hostile to the USSR (NATO, obviously). Furthermore, according to the democratic opposition to the Iliescu administration, the treaty was unacceptable, as it would be interpreted as a *de facto* recognition of the 1939 Molotov – Ribbentrop pact. Thus, this bizarre Soviet – Romanian treaty was regarded as a betrayal of Moldova in its struggle for liberty and a possible re-unification with Romania. This agreement was a proof of Iliescu's allegiance to the imperial centre. Despite Gorbachev's pressure on other ex-socialist countries (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia) to sign similar treaties, Romania was the only country to accept it. Nevertheless, the Soviet-Romanian treaty was never ratified by the Romanian parliament. It became moot after the dissolution of the USSR at the end of 1991.

## **2 1991 – 2001: a decade of meandrous change**

After the ceasefire agreement signed between the Moldovan President **Mircea Snegur** and the President of the Russian Federation **Boris Yeltsin** in July 1992, the newly independent republic continued its harsh fight for economic stabilisation. Having inherited Soviet-era economic malformations (galloping hyperinflation, sudden and uncontrolled liberalisation of prices, rapid currency devaluation, volatilisation of private savings), the Republic of Moldova was now deprived of two-thirds of its industrial capacity, as major industrial units were concentrated in the uncontrolled region of Transnistria. In Soviet times, MSSR's economy was not designed by the Soviet administration to function autonomously. After 1991, strongly inter-dependent economic structures (suppliers, subcontractors, etc.) simply found themselves in different countries, with close to zero liquidities and important trade barriers in front of them. This economic turmoil led to a rapid decrease of living standards. Tens and hundreds of thousands of Moldovans lost their jobs; those who still were employed also suffered a significant decrease of their buying power. A rapidly impoverished population grew sceptical of recent democratic changes. Many Moldovans began to regret the dissolution of the USSR, and struggled in search of a better alternative in a country deprived of a predictable economic stabilisation.

On December 21<sup>st</sup> 1991, the Moldovan President signed the Alma Ata Protocols that are considered to be the founding declarations and principles of

the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This regional organisation was constituted by 11 of the 15 newly independent states (all the ex-USSR republics, excluding the Baltic States and Georgia<sup>3</sup>) and proclaimed in its founding documents the dissolution of the USSR. The Moldovan President signed the Protocols without having a specific permission of the Parliament, the only legal body able to engage the country in international organisations and alliances. The ratification of the Alma Ata Protocols divided the Moldovan political non-communist forces and degenerated into a political crisis. This was at the origin of the dissolution of the Parliament, in December 1993. The anticipated parliamentary elections took place at the end of February 1994 and were won by the Democrat Agrarian Party of Moldova – a conglomerate of local leaders, most of them representatives of the Soviet-era kolkhoz elite. The Agrarians hold the absolute majority, of 56 out of 101 seats, and were able to form the new government. The second largest parliamentary fraction was the neo-communist Socialist Unity, mostly composed of Russian-speaking former directors of state-run industrial giants. In the first session of the new Parliament, in April 1994, the Agrarians and the Socialists voted in favour of the ratification of the Alma Ata Protocols, thus fully legalising Republic of Moldova's adhesion to the CIS.

In the following several years, the Republic of Moldova undertook a controversial path in its foreign politics. On one hand, as a member of CIS, Moldova became part of the Economic union underlying the Commonwealth. However, from the very beginning, the Moldovan authorities refused to adhere to CIS's political and military cooperation instruments, arguing the country's military neutrality proclaimed by the Constitution (adopted in 1994). At the same time, Moldova engaged in an active cooperation process with the European Union and even NATO. In 1994, the country became part of NATO's Peace Partnership and in the following year Moldova became a member of the Council of Europe.

In March 1998 ordinary legislative elections were held in Moldova. Surprisingly, the Democrat Agrarian Party received less than 4% of the votes and did not enter the new Parliament. The new majority was formed by three non-communist parties, under the name Alliance for Democracy and Reforms (ADR). The Communists Party of the Republic of Moldova made its first appearance in the Parliament of independent Moldova, with a solid fraction of

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<sup>3</sup> Georgia joined the CIS in 1993.

40 (out of 101) deputies. Under the ADR rule, significant advancements have been made on the path of deepening the collaboration with the West. The Partnership for Peace with NATO received a new impulse. The framework of relationships between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union was set up by the EU – Moldova Partnership and Cooperation Agreement that came into force in July 1998. However, Moldova remained a member of the CIS and had to constantly support the consequences of economic turmoil that was still raging in Russia. The privatisation of state-owned economic units has been pursued during the rule of ADR in an atmosphere of general suspicion and with very little transparency. Moldova was pulled down by the crisis of the Russian ruble in August 1998, when the Kremlin entered a state of economic default. The Moldovan national currency was then subject to rapid devaluation, losing in only several days more than 80% of its value. Despite a new anti-crisis government formed of new-generation technocrats led by reformist Prime Minister **Ion Sturza** (in office since February 1999), the economic situation did not undergo a significant amelioration. The corruption which was on a very high level did not decrease. The reformist ADR government was ousted in November 1999 by a “monstrous coalition” of Communists and so-called Christian-Democrats which once again proved Russia’s ability to manipulate and control the situation<sup>4</sup>. This happened only one month before the EU Helsinki Summit, where Moldova was supposed to sign several important agreements with the European Union, and maybe obtain a clear adhesion perspective.

The year 2000 was characterised by a fierce political confrontation between several political competitors. On one side was President **Petru Lucinschi** (in office since the beginning of 1997), who struggled for the modification of the Constitution, granting more powers to the Presidential institution. In defending this position, the President lost the support of the Parliament. A consensus of a large majority (Communists, Christian-Democrats, Centre-Left) was achieved and in July 2000 Moldova became a parliamentary republic. The President would be elected by the Parliament, with a minimum of 61 votes (out of 101). After several infructuous attempts to elect a new President according to the newly modified Constitution, the Parliament was dissolved at the end of the year 2000. Anticipated parliamentary elections were announced for February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2001. The Republic of Moldova was then a fragile

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted here that the Russian embassy in Chisinau has more than one thousand employees compared to only thirty employees of the Romanian embassy.

democracy, in the midst of a period of economic disaster, with a political crisis raging for over one year. The results of the anticipated parliamentary elections would come out as a tremendous surprise for everybody.

It should be noted here that from the very beginning of its independence, the Republic of Moldova was strongly sustained by Romania in its pro-Western aspirations. Even during the first years of Ion Iliescu's administration, when Romania's strategic orientation was ambiguous and not yet clearly defined, the close cultural ties with the Republic of Moldova were strengthened. By the middle of the 1990's decade, Romania, where the democratic forces led by the National Peasant Christian Democratic Party (PNTCD) having as president the charismatic **Corneliu Coposu** who spent 17 years in communist jails, gained more and more influence, started to define its long-term strategic policy West-oriented. In the summer of 1995, all the political parties of the country, regardless of their orientation and doctrine, have signed the Snagov Declaration, clearly stating that Romania wants to integrate in the European Union and a regular demand was addressed in this respect to European authorities of Brussels. The Department of the European Integration, a ministerial structure directly subordinated to the Prime Minister of Romania was created. This structure became really important after the elections of December 1996, won by a coalition led by the PNTCD and the nomination of its responsible as minister, member of the Romanian Government. The appointment in this position of **Alexandru Herlea** – an important figure of the Romanian anti-communist resistance who spent more than two decades living in France – was a highly symbolic act. Starting from that very moment, Romania also became a strong supporter of the Republic of Moldova's option in favour of the European Union. During the three years of activity as Minister of European Integration, at the end of which, in December 1999, at the EU Helsinki Summit, Romania was granted the statute of candidate country, **Alexandru Herlea** sustained also the European integration path of the Republic of Moldova. During his official visit to Chisinau in 1998 he declared that Moldova's integration in the EU is as well the way of the re-unification of the Romanian cultural space (Herlea, 2011, pp. 1, 8-9). He offered to **Iurie Leanca**, in charge at that time with Moldova's European integration process, the entire help and assistance of his Department. Moldova benefitted by receiving from the Romanian colleagues the entire European documentation, translated into Romanian (the same language is spoken in the Republic of Moldova). (Herlea, 2013) The signing of the EU – Moldova Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in the summer of

1998 was a very important step forwards and Romania's strong support played a defining role in this achievement.

Romania's support for Moldova's European integration path also manifested itself in the process of recovery of the Romanian citizenship, granted to all persons who have lost the Romanian citizenship for historical reasons, independent of their will, and to their direct descendants, up to the third generation. The ethical and historical foundation of this procedure is based on the idea that the persons having lived in Greater Romania (1918-1940) and their descendants – lost their Romanian citizenship not as an expression of their independent choice, but as a result of the Soviet aggression against Romania during World War II. Granting Romanian citizenship to these persons is then regarded as a simple act of reparation of Stalin's criminal, unjust decisions and deeds. It is nowadays estimated that a number approaching 500,000 Moldovans have recovered their Romanian citizenship through this procedure<sup>5</sup>.

### **3 April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009: the start of new democratic change in Moldova**

In February 2001, the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova wins the parliamentary elections, gaining the constitutional majority of 71 seats (out of the total 101 seats) in the Moldovan Parliament. Four years later, in 2005, the Communists win again the elections, but with "only" 56 seats out of 101. In order to re-elect the Communist President **Vladimir Voronin** (61 votes in the Parliament needed), a political agreement is signed between the Party of Communists, and several opposition right-wing parties. As part of this agreement, the Communists pledge to fully engage into the process of Moldova's European integration. The agreement also contains several specifications regarding the respect of human rights, the guarantees for the functioning of democratic institutions, freedom of press and equal access of all political actors to public media. The Communist leader **Vladimir Voronin** is re-elected by the Parliament as head of the Moldovan state on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Moldova's neighbours and strategic partners (Romania, Ukraine, the European Union and the USA) salute the re-election of **Voronin** as a factor of stability in a

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<sup>5</sup> The process of recovery of Romanian citizenship was temporarily blocked after the intervention of Moldovan Communist authorities in 2005. It was given a new impulse by Romanian president Traian Basescu in 2009, after the end of Communists' rule in Moldova.

region in turmoil, only several months after Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" (end of 2004). Many political analysts start to speak about the so-called "Orange Revolution that had taken place in Voronin's head". The Western world's enchantment is very brief, as the objective reality quickly shows the true face of the neo-Communist regime. The clauses of the above-mentioned political agreement are completely neglected, and the opposition leaders who have voted for the re-election of **Voronin** as President of the Republic of Moldova fall into general disgrace. In this context, the Party of Communists loses hand in the 2007 local elections. These elections are marked by several important events: the democratic opposition wins the majority in 2/3 of the local district councils, and the City Hall of Chisinau (the capital) is won by the young leader of the Liberal Party, **Dorin Chirtoaca** (aged 28). The results of the 2007 local elections mark the beginning of the political change in Moldova. Meanwhile, three Liberal, right-wing parties consolidate their positions. Different polls held several months before the 2009 parliamentary elections show that the Party of Communists should not have the majority in the future Parliament. However, the official results of the April 5<sup>th</sup> 2009 elections proclaim the victory of Communists: 60 seats (out of 101). Allegations of massive fraud are pronounced by the leaders of the democratic opposition, and sustained by a series of international observers. The Communists can form the Government, but not elect the President (61 votes are needed).

On the evening of Monday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, about 20,000 young Moldovans gather spontaneously in the centre of Chisinau, demanding for repeated voting. On the morning of April 7, more than 40,000 young protesters gather in the centre of Chisinau, not far from the Presidency and the Parliament buildings. Police forces do not respond properly to isolated provocations from several tens of troublemakers, infiltrated into the crowd: shortly, direct confrontation degenerates into street fighting between police and protesters. In the afternoon and in the evening, the buildings of the Presidency and Parliament are devastated by a small group of aggressive hooligans. The official government accuses the leaders of the democratic opposition of fomenting the riots. During the night, and several days afterwards, very cruel police actions are directed against the young protesters. Several hundreds of them are severely maltreated in police stations. One protester is dead on the evening of April 7<sup>th</sup>, three others are found dead in particularly odd circumstances.

The massive street protest and the riots of April 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 are considered to be the first "Twitter Revolution" in history. Indeed, the main means of

communication used by young protesters was Internet. Messages were transmitted by using modern media – social networks, micro-blogging platforms, and mobile communications. In handling the protest of the young generation, the Communist government has lost the communication war, by cruelly oppressing the popular will. The events of April 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 represent a turning point in recent history of Moldova, as they have accelerated the democratic change in the country. Moldova has found itself completely isolated, but in several months (after the anticipated elections of July 29<sup>th</sup> 2009) everything would change. The April 2009 events have been followed by several resolutions, adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament. These resolutions clearly state the infringement of basic democratic rules and human rights by the Communist government, and express proneness of the Republic of Moldova for more democracy, freedom and respect of fundamental human rights. In the months that followed the April 7<sup>th</sup> events, the Party of Communists does not manage to receive the one missing vote in the Parliament, in order to elect its candidate (**Zinaida Greceanii**, the Communist Prime-Minister during 2008 – 2009) as President of Moldova. Thus, the Parliament is dissolved and new elections are held on July 29<sup>th</sup> 2009. In these new elections, the Moldovan Diaspora has played a major role. For the first time in recent history, emigrated Moldovans have acted as one political force, promoting democratic values and contributing to the democratic change in their country of origin.

#### **4 Massive emigration from the Republic of Moldova**

The main cause of massive population departure during the last two decades has been the extreme poverty in which the Republic of Moldova has plunged since the 1990s. The collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s was followed by a general economic crisis (also often called “the crisis of the transition towards the market economy”) in all the former Soviet republics. What actually differed from one state to another was the speed of economic recovery. In the case of the Baltic States, for example, the stabilisation and the economic growth have occurred relatively quickly, as a result of serious and dynamic economic reforms, implemented by the ruling political elite immediately after the fall of the Soviet Empire. In the Republic of Moldova, the implementation speed of economic reforms has suffered from the total opposition of interior forces, still loyal to the imperial mentality. Thus, the transition of the Moldovan economy

towards the free market took place very slowly. At the same time, the consolidation of an open society with strong democratic institutions has been seriously slowed down. By mid-1990s, the population of the Republic of Moldova has found itself in a state of extreme poverty. According to the National Human Development Report: Material poverty and human development (Prohniitchi, 2006, p. 35), six main causes of poverty in Moldova can be identified:

- General economic collapse suffered during the transition, failure to reform the economy and consolidate competitive economic sectors;
- High level of endemic corruption;
- Errors in social protection policies;
- The unbalanced economic and socio-demographic structure of the economy;
- Unfavourable geographical factors (lack of domestic energy resources, landlocked position);
- Foreign trade barriers and internal constraints (corruption, administrative barriers);

The consequences of this ravaging poverty have not been very long to show themselves: the end of the 1990s is known as the start of massive emigration of Moldovan citizens. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, we are speaking mainly about economic emigration, as the main reason that has pushed the Moldovan population to move out of the country is poverty. Nevertheless, political reasons cannot be neglected, as we will discuss further, in the context of the Communist Party's rule during 8 years, between 2001 and 2009.

The Moldovan labour market was deeply affected by the massive departure of Moldovan citizens. According to an IOM Report (Kring, 2007, p. 4):

*"[...] By 2006 an estimated 28 per cent of the working population had migrated, constituting 18 per cent of the entire population. Some estimates even suggest that in the period 2003 – 2004 up to 39 per cent of the economically active population has been working overseas."*

As of today, there is no clear picture regarding the number of Moldovan citizens living and/or working abroad: different estimates offer figures varying from 318,000<sup>6</sup> to 1,000,000<sup>7</sup>. How can we explain this situation? As a matter of

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. <[www.statistica.md](http://www.statistica.md)>, retrieved 16/11/2011.

fact, this situation is the conjugated result of several circumstances. In the vast majority of cases, the number of Moldovan diplomatic missions' employees is simply not sufficient and does not dispose of elementary capacities that are needed for an efficient and fruitful collaboration with Moldovan emigrated communities. A certain number of countries with large Moldovan communities simply do not have any Moldovan Embassy or Consulate<sup>8</sup>. Another cause that can explain the lack of precise figures regarding the Moldovan *émigrés* is the phenomenon of circular and/or seasonal migration, which is very common, especially towards the Russian Federation. The vast majority of Moldovans spending several months per year in Russia (especially during the summer) do not even register their stay in this country. There is no need for a visa in order to travel to Russia, and the majority of emigrated Moldovans working there are not officially declared by their employers. Thus, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to estimate the precise number of Moldovans living and/or working in Russia. Another aspect making it very difficult to estimate the number of emigrated Moldovans is the use of the Romanian passport. A large number of Moldovans are nowadays also citizens of Romania. This circumstance gives them free access to the European Union countries, where in most cases they occupy non-declared jobs and have a semi-legal residence status. Depending on the administration of each particular host country, these citizens declare themselves as Moldovans, or as Romanians, or as both. It is therefore easy to understand that this ambiguity does not simplify the task of evaluating correctly the precise number of emigrated Moldovans throughout the world.

Regarding the main characteristics of the Moldovan emigrated communities, several questions arise. In the following, we will attempt to briefly answer several of these questions:

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<sup>7</sup> Unofficial estimates; often cited in various press sources.

<sup>8</sup> The situation in this regard is nevertheless improving in recent years, with the opening of Moldovan Embassies in Spain (2010), Canada (2013) and the Netherlands (2014).

1) *What are the main destination countries for Moldovan migrants?*

	<i>Why?</i>	<i>Type of migration</i>
Western Europe - Italy (est. 225,000) (Josanu, 2011, p. 2), - Spain (est. 60,000) - Portugal (est. 40,000)	- Practically no language barrier (the Romanian language is particularly close to Italian, Spanish and Portuguese) - Cultural proximity - Migration facilities in the early 2000s (massive legalisation campaigns of foreign working migrants in Italy and in Spain)	- Permanent migrants, mainly women in the elderly people care sector, or young men in the construction sector
- Russian Federation (est. 200,000)	- No language barrier (Russian is currently spoken by practically all Moldovans aged over 25, and by a large number of younger Moldovans) - Cultural proximity - No need for a visa	- Permanent migrants, mainly young men in the construction sector, also some seasonal migration in the summer
- Canada (est. 15,000)	- Attractive immigration policy	- Permanent migrants, mainly young families, with high level of education

2) *What is the situation of Moldovan migrants from a legal point of view?*

As of 2008, approximately 35% of migrants still reside in their host countries illegally. Illegal residence status has apparently become more widespread in CIS countries while the situation has improved in the EU and other host countries. As a consequence of massive legalisation campaigns in the beginning of the 2000s, migrants who stay in their destination country for an extended period often manage to obtain regular status. Indeed, of those individuals classified as a migrant in both 2006 and 2008, and without a residence permit in 2006, 65% were legalised by 2008. These observations reflect in part the legalisation campaigns in several West European countries, including Italy and Spain (Kring, 2007, p. 8).

3) *What are the effects of the migration on the household structure in Moldova?*

Since 2006, about 100,000 individuals have left Moldova permanently; of these approximately 60,000 individuals were members of whole households that left Moldova. This number may continue to increase as better opportunities for

legal residence in EU member states can lead to more stable Moldovan Diasporas and migrant networks in desired destination countries.

4) *What are the economic consequences of massive migration for Moldova?*

The large Diaspora now constitutes a key economic factor, and remittances have become vital to the Moldovan economy (Table 1).

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
% of remittances	8	10	14	16	19	25	27	32	39

Table: Remittances as percent of GDP in Moldova (Kring, 2007, p. 5)

5) *Is massive migration leading the country to economic prosperity?*

In order to answer this question, we use here the figures regarding Moldova's Human Development Index rank, according to the *United Nations Human Development Report 2009* (Klugman, 2009, p. 168). In 2009 Moldova was at the 117<sup>th</sup> rank – the lowest of Europe. In 2012<sup>9</sup>, Republic of Moldova's HDI rank is slightly higher, placing the country at the 113<sup>th</sup> place among the 187 countries of the world. As a matter of fact, the largest part of remittances is used for direct consumption, not investment in the economy.

As we have stated before, the Moldovan Diaspora's political activity has known a significant increase in recent years. In order to better illustrate this assertion by concrete figures, we compare here the participation rate and the elections results in the Moldovan emigrated citizens communities in the parliamentary elections of 2009 (April 5<sup>th</sup> and July 29<sup>th</sup>) and 2010<sup>10</sup>. According to statistical data, the number of valid votes cast in the Moldovan Diaspora in the April 5<sup>th</sup> 2009 elections was of 16,916 (1.09 % of total). A total number of 34 voting Bureaus functioned abroad. An equal number of voting Bureaus – 34 – were functioning abroad in the anticipated parliamentary elections several months later, on July 29<sup>th</sup> 2009. The number of valid votes cast abroad in the July elections was slightly superior to that of the April elections: 17,544 (1.10 % of total). In April 2009, the ruling Communists Party of Moldova gained

<sup>9</sup> The 2012 HDI rank is the most recent data available at this moment.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. <www.alegeri.md>, retrieved 14/11/2011.

approximately 49.5% of the votes in the Republic of Moldova<sup>11</sup>, and only 8.5% in the Diaspora. Roughly similar results were registered in July of the same year. The Communists Party received 44.7% of votes in July, the redistribution of the other votes resulted in a minority Communist fraction of the Communists. In this situation, a large anti-Communist alliance, called the Alliance for European Integration, was formed by four non-Communist parliamentary fractions. However, none of the political poles was able to gather the 61 votes, necessary for the election of a new president.

The following period can be characterised by a political crisis, due to the impossibility of electing a president. A constitutional Referendum was announced for the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, 2010. The question addressed to Moldovan voters regarded the modification of the 78<sup>th</sup> Article of the Constitution, in favour of the election of the president by universal election, directly by Moldovan voters. The Referendum was not validated, as less than 33% of the Moldovan voters participated in the scrutiny. Given the results of the Referendum, the Parliament was dissolved and legislative elections were announced for November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The sharp rise of the number of electoral bureaus abroad in the 2010 elections (85 bureaus, compared to 34 electoral bureaus in 2009) resulted into a very important increase of the number of voters: this figure has almost tripled. The number of valid votes cast in Diaspora in 2010 was of 64,201 (3.70 % of the total). Once again, the structure of the vote in the Diaspora was extremely different if compared to the results inside the country. While in Moldova the Communists Party received 39.3% of the votes, in the Diaspora this figure was less than 7%. These figures lead us to the following conclusion: in Republic of Moldova's case, Diaspora appears as the main force of democratic change, capable of influencing the composition of the Moldovan Parliament in favour of democratic, liberal, and pro-European oriented parties.

## **5 Recent developments in Republic of Moldova's European integration process**

After the parliamentary elections of November 28<sup>th</sup> 2010, the Alliance for European Integration was constituted by the 3 non-communist fractions: PD (Democratic Party, centre-left), PLDM (Liberal-Democratic Party of Moldova,

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<sup>11</sup> Allegations of massive electoral fraud led to popular contestation, as described in the previous chapter.

centre-right) and PL (Liberal Party, right). The Communists Party was the only parliamentary opposition force. Together, these three parties had 59 deputies out of 101, a number still insufficient for electing the President. According to the Alliance agreement, **Marian Lupu**, the leader of the Democratic Party, was elected as President of the Parliament and became *ad-interim* President of the Republic of Moldova. The political uncertainty continued through the year 2011. Different scenarios regarding the election of the President were a subject of harsh debate in the Parliament and in the Moldovan society. On many occasions, the election of the President served as a means of pressuring the governing alliance, or as an instrument of political competition between the three parties in power. All different aspects were discussed: what kind of person would be acceptable as a presidential candidate for the three parties composing the Alliance, and would also be accepted by the opposition deputies? What would be his/her political and personal past and what kind of personality would be better suited for the job? A large number of potential candidates have been discussed during more than a year. Meanwhile, several deputies led by **Igor Dodon** left the Communists Party parliamentary faction, forming a small group of Socialist deputies. In theory, more than 61 Moldovan deputies were non-Communist; therefore the election of the President became possible. A viable solution was identified in March of 2012. **Nicolae Timofti**, a former president of the Central Electoral Commission in the 1990's, and judge in the Supreme Court, gathered more than 61 votes and was elected by the Parliament as President of the Republic of Moldova. This put an end to 2.5 years of political instability. The Republic of Moldova could now concentrate on the implementation of reforms and the deepening of the European integration process.

In 2009, the European Union launched the Eastern Partnership – a comprehensive instrument of the EU Neighbourhood Policy in the interaction with 6 former Soviet republics: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Eastern Partnership was the initiative of Poland and Sweden, and its main objective is to improve the political and economic relations of the six post-Soviet countries with the European Union. Promoting the respect of human rights and the rule of law in the Eastern vicinity of the European Union is the core of the Eastern Partnership policy. This new political instrument of the European Union proclaims that one of its main objectives is the signing of Association Agreements between the EU and those countries who have made sufficient progress towards the basic values and principles that are

at the foundation of the Partnership. The enlargement of the European Union through this instrument is not clearly stated, but nevertheless the Eastern Partnership is considered by many experts as a necessary and important stage for the six post-Soviet republics on their path of becoming an EU member-state.

While still formally a member of the CIS, Moldova was making progress on the path approaching the country to the EU. The country manifested itself in the best possible way within the Eastern Partnership, by rapidly accomplishing the necessary steps towards the establishment of a serious, trustful relationship with the European Union. A Roadmap and an Action Plan was designed and was being actively implemented by Moldovan authorities, in order to receive a free-visa regime for the EU countries, for all Moldovan citizens. The first talks regarding the establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between the EU and Moldova started at the end of 2010<sup>12</sup>. In parallel, the Association Treaty between Moldova and the European Union was negotiated.

The first half of 2013 was a difficult, challenging period for Moldova's interior politics. An unfortunate and tragic incident during a hunting party in the North of the country was followed by a very severe political conflict between the three political parties forming the ruling coalition. The culmination of this political turmoil was the reversal of the Government led by Prime Minister Vlad Filat (March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013). According to a decision of the Constitutional Court, Filat was no longer able to serve as Prime Minister. The spectrum of anticipated parliamentary elections and a possible revenge of the Communists became very realistic. After several weeks of negotiations, a new government led by Prime Minister **Iurie Leanca** (former Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration) was invested on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The new Moldovan government, supported by a fragile pro-European Coalition (53 deputies out of 101) had a difficult yet feasible mission: save Moldova's European integration process. This mission was accomplished at the end of 2013, when in Vilnius was held the Summit of the Eastern Partnership (November 28-29, 2013). At this Summit, Moldova initialled the Association Agreement with the European Union. The Agreement includes provisions establishing the DCFTA. In February 2014, the European Parliament voted in favour of eliminating the visa regime for Moldovan citizens.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. <<http://www.easternpartnership.org>>, retrieved 25/2/2014.

## **Conclusions**

The Republic of Moldova (Bessarabia and Transnistria in its larger, historical sense) is part of the ethnical and cultural Romanian space. Throughout history, the principality of Moldova has asserted its belonging to the unitary national Romanian areal; thus, despite nowadays geo-political realities, it has a “natural” allegiance to the European civilisation and to the Western world. For the last several centuries the Eastern Romanian provinces (Bessarabia, Transnistria, and Northern Bukovina) were the places of confrontation of the Russian imperialist doctrine, proclaimed in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, with the modern, liberal, Western vision of the World. Thus, this territory is best described as a frontier between two competing ideologies, two viewpoints, and two civilisations.

The economic and social development of the Republic of Moldova has been undermined since the very moment of its independence, by forces that were still loyal to the Soviet imperialist mentality. The formation of the new state should have been only a stage on the path of re-unification with Romania. Instead, the Republic of Moldova was forced to fight for its existence, against Russian aggression which used all KGB arsenals including the promotion of separatist tendencies.

In the last several decades, the Republic of Moldova has oscillated between the East (being a member-state of the CIS), and the West (collaborating actively with NATO and engaging into the European integration process). This oscillation has often proved to be counterproductive, as the country has witnessed deep, endemic economic crisis, several territorial separatist conflicts and the departure of a very large number of active persons.

The Moldovan Diaspora is a recent phenomenon that has appeared in the 1990s, and takes its origins in the severe poverty that has struck the Republic of Moldova after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Recent elections have shown that Moldovan Diaspora participates more and more actively in the electoral processes related to Moldova. The active implication of the Moldovan Diaspora in the political life of their homeland shows the willingness of the Diaspora to help the country, not only by massive remittances. Therefore, from the political perspective, the Moldovan Diaspora represents a hope for the process of genuine, sustainable democratisation of Moldova.

As stated by its political leaders, the re-unification with the Republic of Moldova is from now on the main political goal of the Romanian external policy.

In this situation, the Republic of Moldova has made its choice. Active implementation of the European integration of the Republic of Moldova is the best proof of the nature of the civilisation choice that has been made. Moldova has a natural direction of development: all vectors are pointing westwards. In the next several years, the country should act on behalf of its convictions, in order to not waste the occasion to re-integrate to its natural space.

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