

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AT THE END OF AN ELECTION MARATHON?

A NEW VERSION OF THE ALLIANCE FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, AND MORE UNCERTAINTY

Holger Dix

The parties which have come together to form the Alliance for European Integration (AIE) were able to clinch the early parliamentary elections held on November 28, 2010, and thus avoided the Communist Party's return to power. But the elections did not pull the country out of the depths of its political and constitutional crisis. Once again the vote failed to produce the majority needed to elect a President, and further early elections are looming, just like in July 2009 and November 2010.

A CONSTANT SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Since it was founded in 1991, the Republic of Moldova has been on a search for its political and geopolitical identity¹ which has been characterized by constantly changing directions and ongoing political crises. Up to 2000 there was a phase of political instability; then during the first four years of the Communist Party's return to government there was a phase of political stability and rapprochement to Russia (up to 2005). The Communist government then forged closer ties with the European Union, while at the same time becoming increasingly repressive. Later, the Communists were overturned by the Alliance for European Integration with correspondingly pro-European policies. Since 2009 there has been an ongoing political crisis marked by several elections which have failed to produce a clear result.



Dr. Holger Dix is Resident Representative of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Bucharest, in charge of the KAS offices in Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

1 | For more detail see: Dan Dungaciu, *Moldova ante portas* (Bukarest, 2005).

The real nature of the political protagonists also remains shrouded in mystery. The Communist Party comes across as extremely capitalistic in the way it looks after its supporters, democratic forces are under suspicion of being influenced by the oligarchs and their interests, and vociferous anti-Communists have become the lackeys of the Communist Party (PCRM). The nation's unity is also highly precarious. The founding of the Republic of Moldova sparked a brief armed conflict, resulting in the more industrialized, Russian-speaking region of Transnistria breaking away to form its own separatist government, which is however not internationally recognized. The ongoing conflict with Transnistria means the Moldovan government has lost control of part of its territory, which limits its ability to act and is a stumbling block to hopes of European integration. Another region, the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia also broke away in 1990, first of all to form the unrecognized independent Gagauzian Socialist Republic, then since 1994 as an autonomous region recognized by the Republic of Moldova with its own Parliament and government.

Negotiations on an Association Agreement with the EU, which should also include a comprehensive free trade agreement, have commenced and are successfully moving forward.

The country has also been characterized by constant changes of direction with regard to ties with the European Union and Russia, which in hindsight seem to be more influenced by pragmatism than ideals. At present there is a widespread desire among the people and across parties to move closer to the EU. The current government led by Prime Minister Vlad Filat and Foreign Minister Iurie Leancă has intensified relations with the EU since assuming office. Negotiations on an Association Agreement, which should also include a comprehensive free trade agreement, have commenced and are successfully moving forward.² The new government also lifted travel restrictions on Romania, which had been introduced by the PCRM government as a result of the unrest in April 2009. Shortly before the November 2010 parliamentary elections Prime Minister Filat signed a border treaty with Romania.

2 | See statements by the incumbent Foreign Minister Natalia German and EU Ambassador Dirk Schübel on the occasion of the KAS conference "Republik Moldaus Zukunft in der Europäischen Union. Stand und Perspektiven der Annäherung" (The future of the Republic of Moldova in the European Union: State and perspectives of the rapprochement) on November 16, 2010 in Chișinău. Audio file at: <http://kas.de/moldawien/de/publications/21313> (accessed December 21, 2010).

On the other hand, almost 20 years after the Republic of Moldova declared its independence, Russia still exerts a strong influence on the country, something which can take the form of cooperation and partnership or of peremptory intervention, depending on the attitude of the Moldovan government. Russia basically views the Republic of Moldova as belonging to an exclusive zone of influence which also includes the other former Soviet states. This influence is leveraged by the Transnistrian conflict, economic relations, energy supplies, Russia's opinion-forming impact on the media, the Russian Orthodox Church and the country's Russian minority.³ Russia works closely with the government in Tiraspol, providing political, financial, economic and military support. Any Moldovan actions against Transnistria spark a reaction from Russia, as in March 2006 when the Moldovan government blocked exports by Transnistrian companies which were not registered in Chișinău. Russia countered by blocking imports of Moldovan wine. Russia still has troops and equipment stationed in Transnistria, despite having agreed to their withdrawal at the 1999 OSCE Summit in Istanbul. Russia is also still an important export market for Moldova and exploits its position as a key market in order to when necessary exert pressure on the Moldovan government, most recently through another import ban on Moldovan wine as a reaction to the announcement made by interim President Mihai Ghimpu that June 28 should be a day commemorating the Soviet occupation.

A FRAGMENTED POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AND UNSTABLE ALLIANCES

The Republic of Moldova's political landscape is characterized by a large number of parties, many of which are very short-lived.⁴ Since independence, a total of 104 parties have been registered. If we exclude those parties which have just changed their names, we are still left with 77 different groupings which have fought to win the vote

3 | Cf. Radu Vrabie, "Relationship of the Republic of Moldova with the Russian Federation," in: Foreign Policy Association and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (eds.), *The Foreign Policy of the Republic of Moldova (1998-2008)* (Chișinău 2010), 99-112.

4 | Cf. Igor Volnitchi, *Istoria Partidelor din Republica Moldova* (Chișinău: 2010).

of the country's 2.9 million-strong electorate over the last 20 years. Recent parties with the most realistic prospects of getting into Parliament have been the Democratic Party of Moldova, the Liberal Party, the Alliance Our Moldova, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM).

The PDM describes itself as social-democratic and centre-left, is a member of Socialist International and has signed a partnership agreement with the United Russia party.

The precursor to the Democratic Party of Moldova, the "Movement for a Prosperous and Democratic Moldova" (MpMDP), was founded in 1997 and then was renamed the

Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) in April 2000. The party describes itself as social-democratic and centre-left, is a member of Socialist International and has signed a partnership agreement with the United Russia party. The PDM won seats in Parliament in 1998 as part of an electoral bloc, but in the early elections of 2001 the party failed to meet the election threshold, gaining only five per cent of the vote. They had earlier been involved in raising this threshold from four to six per cent.⁵ In the 2005 parliamentary elections the PDM once again formed an electoral bloc and won eight seats in Parliament. As an independent faction, the party joined with the Christian Democrats (PPCD) and Social Liberal Party to support the presidency of Communist candidate Vladimir Voronin, in order to avoid a political stalemate. In 2007 there was internal conflict between the party leaders Dumitru Diacov and Vlad Filat, leading to the latter leaving the PDM and founding the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM). In the parliamentary elections held in April 2009 the PDM only won two per cent of the vote and therefore failed to gain any seats in Parliament.

Support for the party increased when former Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament Marian Lupu defected from the Communist Party to join the PDM shortly before the July 2009 parliamentary elections. However, the political costs of Lupu's defection were high for the PDM's old guard. Lupu successfully pushed through his appointment as party leader, along with the top five places on the party list for "his" candidates. The elections in July 2009 resulted in 13 MPs taking their seats in Parliament, with Marian Lupu being nominated as candidate for the presidency of the Alliance for European Integration (AIE).

5 | Ibid., 88 et sqq.

The Liberal Party (PL) was founded in 1993 as the Party of Reform. It had no electoral success until 2005, when it benefited from the decision made by the Christian Democrats and the Social Liberal Party after the 2005 elections to support the presidential bid of Communist candidate Voronin, a decision which caused disaffection among their voters. The party then selected the 27-year-old lawyer Dorin Chirtoacă to be their candidate for the mayoral elections in Moldova's capital, Chișinău. This selection was particularly popular among the city's young, reform-minded population, and in 2007 Chirtoacă was indeed elected mayor by a clear majority. In the April 2009 parliamentary elections the PL became at a stroke the strongest opposition party, winning 15 seats. In the July elections the party further increased its share of the vote, but still only held 15 seats. The Liberal Party is particularly strong amongst pro-Romanian voters and its political objectives are distinctly liberal. On a European level they align themselves with the European Liberals.

The Liberal Party is particularly strong amongst pro-Romanian voters and its political objectives are distinctly liberal. On a European level they align themselves with the European Liberals.

The Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM) was formed only recently, in December 2007. They are led by the current Prime Minister, Vlat Filat, who organised and financed the party right from the beginning and then led them to success in the April 2009 parliamentary elections. With 15 seats, and in combination with the PL, the PLDM became the strongest opposition group. In July 2009 they increased their seats to 18. Immediately after the party was founded, the PLDM tried to forge ties with the European People's Party and applied for affiliation, which will lead to it being granted observer status.

The Alliance Our Moldova Party (AMN) was founded in 1997 under the name "Civic Alliance for Reforms". In 2001, as the "Party of Social Democracy" it took part in the parliamentary elections as part of an electoral alliance and won 19 seats in Parliament. The alliance was dissolved after the elections and the Party of Social Democracy became the Social-Democratic Alliance of Moldova (ASDM). In 2003 the ASDM merged with the Liberal Party and the Independents' Alliance to form the new Alliance Our Moldova (AMN). In the 2005 elections the party joined forces with the PDM and the Social Liberal Party to form the Electoral

Bloc Democratic Moldova (BMD), winning 34 seats and becoming the strongest faction after the Communists. The party stood alone at the local elections in 2007 and became the country's second political party, despite a few internal problems. However, they were unable to maintain this position in the parliamentary elections in April 2009, winning only 11 seats because of the emergence of two new parties in the centre-right spectrum, the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova. In the 2009 elections the party only won 7 seats. The AMN has observer status within the Liberal International.

The Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) was founded in 1994 and declared itself to be the successors to the Communist Party which was active in Moldova during Soviet rule. The PCRM first put itself to the vote in the local elections of 1995. With results ranging from 5 to 15 per cent it proved that a Communist Party could still attract support among voters. The direct presidential elections of 1996 led to the PCRM candidate Vladimir Voronin winning

ten per cent of the vote and third place. In the 1998 parliamentary elections the PCRM won 30 per cent of the vote and 40 of the 101 seats. The Communists then made their political breakthrough in the early parliamentary elections held in 2001, which were

a result of Parliament's failure to elect a President in 2000. In these elections the PCRM won 40.07 per cent of the vote and 71 seats, giving them the majority required to elect the President. In April 2001 the Parliament made Vladimir Voronin President of Moldova. The bad blood which arose between the Moldavian government and Russia as a result of Voronin's last-minute rejection of the Russian proposal for resolution of the Transnistria conflict (the Kozak Memorandum) cost the PCRM the support of pro-Russian voters during the 2005 elections. After Russia's failed attempt at mediation, Voronin announced that Moldova would be forging closer ties with the EU. As a result of this, the 2005 parliamentary elections saw the PCRM once again become the strongest party with 56 seats, but it fell just short of the 61 seats required to elect a President. Voronin could only be re-elected with the support of the Christian Democrat Party (PPCD), the Democratic Party and the Social Liberal Party. In the April 2009 elections the

The Communists made their political breakthrough in the early parliamentary elections held in 2001, which were a result of Parliament's failure to elect a President in 2000.

Communists managed to increase their share of the vote to 49 per cent and 60 seats, but were accused of becoming increasingly authoritarian and of repressing the opposition. Controversy over the PCRM's surprisingly good election results led to violent public protests which were put down by repressive government action. This resulted in the Party losing popular support and the opposition parties closing ranks.

DISPUTED PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN 2009

Two parliamentary elections were held in 2009. Those held on April 5, 2009 united the political opposition and large sections of the country's younger population in the hope that the Communists would lose power. The opposition tried to build on the fact that the Communists had been losing support over the previous few years. But the opposition parties' hopes were dashed by the announcement of the preliminary election results. After 98 per cent of votes had been counted, it was clear that the Communist Party had won an absolute majority which would give them the right to govern alone for the next four years.

The Communists had won just under 50 per cent of the vote, followed by the Liberal Party led by the Mayor of Chișinău, Dorin Chirtoacă, with 13 per cent, the Liberal Democratic Party with 12 per cent and the Alliance Our Moldova with 10 per cent. With 61 of 101

seats, the Communists were in a position to elect a successor to the incumbent President, Vladimir Voronin, who was constitutionally barred from seeking another term. On April

7 there was a mass rally of young people

in Chișinău who protested against the re-election of the Communists and the developments taking place in their country. The demonstration went off peacefully at first but later there was violent rioting which sent shockwaves through Moldavian society. The Moldavian government and police were overwhelmed by the situation and seemed unsure how to deal with it. Political tensions increased, and the initial failure of the state authorities to act, along with the lack of a protest culture, the lack of clear goals among the demonstrators and the probable manipulation of the protesters led to the occupation and partial destruction

On April 7, 2009 there was a mass rally of young people in Chișinău who protested against the re-election of the Communists and the developments taking place in their country.

of the Parliament building and Presidential Office. The government blamed the opposition and foreign influence (Romania) for the violence. For its part, the opposition accused the government of using *agents provocateurs* to orchestrate the riots. After its initial hesitancy, the state reacted heavy-handedly.⁶ Protesters were arrested that night and in the days that followed, there was

Visa restrictions were instituted against Romania, which the Moldavian President accused of being involved in a coup plot. The Romanian ambassador was ejected.

a wave of arrests which included journalists. Four people died as a result of the riots and the subsequent government repression.

In contravention of EU agreements, visa restrictions were instituted against Romania, which the Moldavian President accused of being involved in a coup plot. The Romanian ambassador in Chișinău was ejected and President Voronin called Romania's efforts to advance Moldova's membership of the EU "humiliating".

The final results of the April 5 elections sufficed to enable to PCRM to build a new government. But the party was one seat short of the 61 seats required to elect the President in Parliament. The PCRM then failed to obtain the one vote needed from the ranks of the opposition. The three opposition parties at that time – the Liberal Democratic Party led by Vlad Filat (PLDM), the Alliance Our Moldova (AMN) and the Liberal Party (PL) – formed a united front against the re-election of a President from the ranks of the PCRM. As a result, new elections were called on July 27, 2009.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SYSTEM LEADS TO POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

The cause of the political crisis – along with the complicated election results and the inability of MPs to work with them – lies in the system for electing the President in Parliament. Since a constitutional amendment was made in July 2000, the Republic of Moldova's system of government is a parliamentary democracy, which followed on from the previous semi-presidential system. This constitutional amendment strengthened Parliament and weakened the President, who was now elected by Parliament rather than by direct vote. The President has a role which is clearly still much

6 | Cf. Mihnea Berindei and Arielle Thedrel: "Moldavie, La fin de l'ère Voronine," *politique internationale* 125 (2009), 249-261.

more than just ceremonial, but some of his prerogatives were taken away, including the right to participate in or lead cabinet meetings. But the office still carries weight, as is reflected by the high election threshold in Parliament, because of the responsibilities it still holds, such as the right to appoint the Prime Minister (who is then confirmed by Parliament), the right to initiate legislation and its role as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Accordingly, the President is elected by a 3/5 majority (61 seats) out of the total 101 MPs in Parliament. If the vote produces no result in the first round, there is a run-off between the top two candidates. If this also fails to produce an adequate majority, Parliament is dissolved and new elections are called.

The very first attempt by Parliament to elect a President failed in December 2000.⁷ The subsequent new elections on February 25, 2001 resulted in the Communists getting back into power with 71 seats. In order to break the stalemate, some opposition members voted for the Communist candidate, an action which consigned them to the political wilderness in the eyes of both many Western observers and the Moldovan people. It was a fateful decision for the Christian Democrats under Iurie Roșca, who never succeeded in winning back the trust of the people and who have since failed to win a single parliamentary seat in three attempts.

To break the stalemate, some opposition members voted for the Communist candidate. It was a fateful decision for the Christian Democrats who never succeeded in winning back the voter's trust.

VOTING OUT OF THE COMMUNISTS IN THE JULY 2009 ELECTIONS

The new elections held on July 29, 2009 led to the Communist Party being removed from power.⁸ The campaigns became increasingly bitter, with both camps (CP and opposition) laying the blame for the violent unrest of April 2009 with each other. The media was under the strict control of the Communist Party, but the opposition parties

7 | Cf. Ghenadie Vaculovschi and Norbert Neuhaus, "Dezideratul reformei constitutionale in republica Moldova," in: IDRAD (ed.), *Aspecte prioritare* (Chișinău: 2010).

8 | See also in particular Hans Martin Sieg, "Machtwechsel in der Krise," *KAS-Länderbericht*, October 7, 2009, <http://kas.de/rumaenien/de/publications/17774> (accessed December 21, 2010).

as a whole (PLDM, PL, PD and AMN) managed to gather momentum and win 53 seats, meaning that they could combine in the Alliance for European Integration (AIE) and form a government.

The PCRM only won 48 seats, and of the parties who had previously been in Parliament, the Liberal Democrats gained 18 seats, the Liberals 15 and the Alliance Our Moldova 7. The social-democrat Democratic Party of Moldova won 13 seats and re-entered Parliament. Vlad Filat (leader of the PLDM) was appointed Prime Minister, with Mihai Gimpău (leader of the PL) becoming Speaker of the Parliament and Marian Lupu (leader of the DPM) being selected as candidate for the Presidency. The main goals of the Alliance

were the reestablishment of the rule of law, overcoming the social and economic crisis, the promotion of decentralisation and local autonomy, resolving the Transnistria conflict, and European integration.

The election result did nothing to resolve the dilemma of achieving the majority required to elect a President. The Alliance still needed eight votes from the PCRM.

However, the election result did nothing to resolve the dilemma of achieving the majority required to elect a President. The Alliance still needed eight votes from the PCRM, which failed to materialise in any of the ballots.

CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATE AND A FAILED REFERENDUM

This vote led to a debate on the need for constitutional changes, with proposed solutions ranging from changing the method of electing the President in Parliament, to the introduction of direct presidential elections, to comprehensive constitutional reform.⁹ In March the PCRM made a proposal for a constitutional amendment which retained the President's election by Parliament but which sought to lower the quorum needed for an absolute majority in a third ballot. In this way the PCRM cleverly appropriated the simplest and most obvious proposal for reform. But the governing coalition found it difficult to act on the suggestion of their political opponents, the more so because there were doubts about the Communist's trustworthiness when it came to a parliamentary vote.

9 | See also Hans Martin Sieg, "Die Republik Moldau in der Verfassungskrise," *KAS-Länderbericht*, April 23, 2010, <http://kas.de/moldawien/de/publications/19419> (accessed December 21, 2010).

Within the AIE it was the social-democrat Democratic Party (PDM) who supported the idea of direct presidential elections. Their popular leader, Marian Lupu, who had been selected as the coalition's candidate for the presidency in December, would have stood a good chance in a direct election. The prospect of direct presidential elections and the attendant political upgrading of the office aroused the interest of the coalition partners to stand as candidates themselves – including the Prime Minister. The tensions which already plagued working relationships within the governing coalition became heightened still more by this growing rivalry.

Despite these dangers, in the end the coalition scheduled a referendum on September 5, 2010 with a view to introducing direct presidential elections. Polls suggested that the coalition's proposal met with the approval of 70 per cent of voters. On the day itself, more than 90 per cent of voters supported the proposal. Yet the referendum still failed because voter turnout was slightly under the required one third of the electorate. In the lead-up to the referendum the Communist Party had called for a boycott, and it seems they succeeded in persuading their supporters to stay away: exit polls in Chișinău indicated that it was mostly only coalition party supporters who took part in the referendum. Following the failed referendum, the incumbent President dissolved Parliament and called new elections on November 28, 2010 – the third parliamentary elections since April 2009.

Following the failed referendum, the incumbent President called new elections in November 2010 – the third parliamentary elections since April 2009.

SETTING A DIRECTION FOR 2010

The governing coalition's starting position at the parliamentary elections was unclear. In a survey carried out by the Institute for Public Policy in October/November 2010, 60 per cent of respondents said they thought the country was heading in the wrong direction. Only 24 per cent were satisfied with the direction being taken.¹⁰ Public approval of the performance of their political leaders was alarmingly low. Dissatisfaction among those surveyed was expressed as follows: almost 74 per cent were unhappy with health

10 | Cf. Institutul Politici Publice (ed.), *Barometrul Opinie Publică* (Chișinău: November 2010).

care provision, 85 per cent with the development of the job market, 78 per cent with the pension system, 80 per cent with the fight against corruption and 85 per cent with wage levels.¹¹ The government's performance under Prime Minister Vlad Filat was rated by three per cent of respondents as very good, 20 per cent as quite good, 35 per cent as neither good nor bad, 20 per cent as bad and 10 per cent as very bad.

In actual fact the government of the AIE was out of kilter, and the basic conditions required for successful governance were unfavourable. Prime Minister Filat had inherited from the Communists an economy which was in freefall with a negative growth rate of -6.5 per cent. The state institutions were bloated with poorly-trained employees who were badly paid and largely resistant to reform.¹² The new government took over against an international backdrop of economic crisis in the EU states and a Russia which was trying to increase its influence in the region. The repeated failure of Parliament to elect a President had once again led to the spectre of new elections, making it difficult for the government to implement any medium-to-long-term measures. However, the government was still able to notch up some significant successes, including reopening talks with the International Monetary Fund and starting intensive and successful negotiations with the EU on forging closer ties with Europe and financial support. The economy was stabilised, and the budget deficit is expected to be brought down from 6.8 per cent in 2009 to 4-4.5 per cent in 2010. However there was no or very little progress made in reforming the judiciary and civil service and in safeguarding economic competitiveness.¹³ Right from the start the ruling coalition showed signs of being in a marriage of convenience which clearly shared common political goals but which did not possess the tools to ensure sufficient agreement and communication within the coalition itself.

11 | Results for 'very unhappy' and 'not very happy' were combined. Other response options were 'fairly happy' and 'very happy'.

12 | Cf. Expert Grup: Moldova Economic Growth Analysis (Analiza Creșterii Economice în Moldova), December 2010, <http://expert-grup.org/?en> (accessed December 21, 2010).

13 | See also Igor Botăș: "Anul politic 2010" (Political year 2010), December 31, 2010, in: <http://e-democracy.md/en/monitoring/politics/comments/political-year-2010> (accessed January 3, 2011).

Perhaps also in face of the uncertain prospects of election success, in June the ruling coalition decided to make changes to the electoral law which to some extent worked to the advantage of the smaller parties. This brought suspicions that the changes had been designed to disadvantage the PCRM. These included lowering the electoral threshold from six to four per cent and a change in the way the votes were distributed for parties and alliances which were below this threshold. Previously these votes had been distributed on a proportional basis, which favoured the stronger parties. At the July elections, they were distributed for the first time equally between all parties which had won seats in Parliament. The formation of electoral alliances was once again permitted and candidates with multiple nationalities were once again allowed to stand for election.

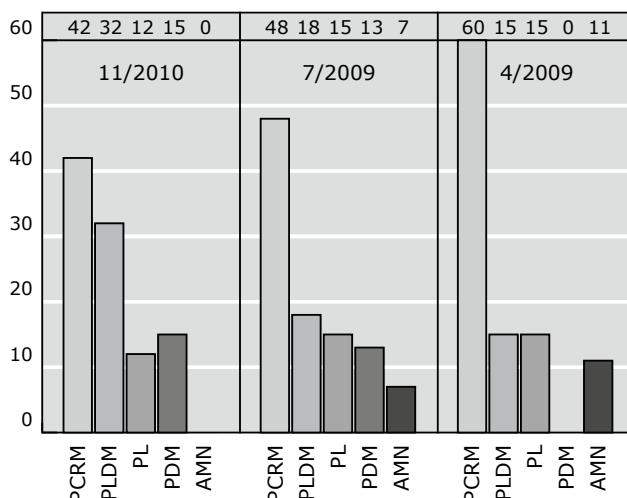
20 parties and 20 independent candidates took part in the elections. On election night, a clear win was at first predicted for the Alliance for European Integration. Two polling institutes had predicted them to be clear victors with either 65 or 64 seats. One of these institutes (IRES) even gave the Liberal Democratic Party of Prime Minister Filat a lead of nearly nine per cent over the Communists. In the end these projections deviated from the following day's official results announced by the electoral authority by as much as 16 per cent.

Once the official results were in, the Communist Party was once again the strongest party with 39.3 per cent of the vote and 42 seats in Parliament. The Liberal Democrats improved markedly on their previous result, gaining 29.4 per cent of the vote and 32 seats, making them the second most powerful party. The Democratic Party (Social Democrats) won 12.7 per cent and 15 seats and the Liberal Party gained 10 per cent and 12 seats. The Alliance Our Moldova which had previously been members of the Alliance for European Integration failed to win a single seat with only 2 per cent of the vote. The Christian Democratic People's Party (PPCD) hit a new low with the voters, winning only 9,054 votes and 0.5 per cent of the vote.

The AIE, whose survival had been in question, won 59 seats, only just missing out on the 61 seats necessary to elect the President.

Fig. 1

Changes in number of seats won



Source: Alegeri parlamentare în Republica Moldovaen, Asociația pentru Democrație Participativă (ADEPT), <http://e-democracy.md/elections/parliamentary> (accessed January 3, 2011).

A comparison with the results of the two elections held in 2009 shows the steady decline of the Communist Party (PCRM) from 60 seats in April 2009 to 42 in the current vote. Of note is also the steady increase in seats won by the Liberal Democrats (PLDM) – in the meantime receiving support from the European People's Party – from 15 seats in April 2009 to the present 32.

DIFFICULTIES IN BUILDING A COALITION AND OTHER UNCERTAIN PROSPECTS FOR THE GOVERNMENT

After the elections the possible constellation of the coalition remained open. One possibility was a continuation of the AIE, with the PLDM, PDM and PL forming a government. But it was questionable whether such a coalition was based on a sufficient level of trust, particularly between PLDM leader Filat and PDM leader Lupu.

A coalition of the Democratic Party and the Communist Party was also a possibility and would have provided the majority required to form a government. The fact that Lupu had been a member of the PCRM until 2009 was a factor in favour of such a coalition, as he clearly had no fear of dealing with the Communists. Besides, in the course of talks the PCRM had offered Lupu the position of President and his party the chance to appoint the Prime Minister. A PDM/PCRM coalition would also have been very much in Russia's interest. This fact was highlighted by a visit made by Sergei Nariskin, Head of the Russian Presidential Administration, who offered incentives for a PDM/PCMR coalition in the form of reduced gas prices, the unobstructed export of Moldovan wine and agricultural products to Russia and even proposed solutions to the Transnistria conflict.¹⁴

The European Union also made its presence known during the coalition talks. The President of the EU Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, travelled personally to Chișinău to show the EU's interest in the formation of the coalition and demonstrate the good relationship between the EU and the Republic of Moldova. The German government had already been active throughout 2010 and sent Werner Hoyer, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, to Chișinău during the coalition talks, which was seen as a clear expression of Germany's interest in the formation of a pro-European coalition.¹⁵

The visit of Germany's Minister of State at the Foreign Office during coalition talks was seen as an expression of the country's interest in the formation of a pro-European coalition.

However, neither coalition would have had the number of votes necessary to elect a President in Parliament. This majority could only have been achieved by a coalition of the Communists with the Liberal Democrats, which was however highly unlikely and quickly ruled out by Prime Minister Filat. An all-party coalition would have been possible in theory but would have been dubious from a

14 | Cf. "Republica Moldova: Moscova promite ieftinirea gazelor, daca PD face alianta cu PCRM," *HotNews.ro*, December 11, 2010, in: <http://hotnews.ro/stiri-international-8119587-republica-moldova-moscova-promite-ieftinirea-gazelor-daca-face-alianta-pcrm> (accessed December 23, 2010).

15 | See inter alia "Germania manifestă un interes real pentru Republica Moldova," December 22, 2010, *Mediafax*, in: <http://arena.md/?go=news&n=2294> (accessed December 23, 2010).

democratic point of view, as the government would then have had no opposition.

After a month of arduous coalition negotiations, the PLDM, PDM and PL finally agreed to a continuation of the Alliance for European Integration. The Democratic Party had also held talks with the Communists up until the coalition agreement was reached, exploiting their strong negotiating position when it came to forming a majority.

Marian Lupu took over as Interim President in December 2010. He became the third transitional President within three days.

On December 30, 2010 Marian Lupu was elected Speaker of the Parliament by the Alliance and took over as Interim President. After Interim President Ghimpu (until December 28, 2010) and Interim President Vlat Filat, who took over as Head of State from being Prime Minister when Ghimpu's term expired on December 28, Lupu became the third transitional President within three days. In this role he gave Vlad Filat the task of building a cabinet and drawing up a government programme which was approved by Parliament on January 14, 2011.

The composition of the cabinet shows the dominating position of the Liberal Democratic Party, which allocates the Prime Minister and seven other ministers, including the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Education. Five ministerial posts (including Deputy Prime Minister) go to each coalition partner. According to the agreements among the coalition partners, the chairman of the Democratic Party Marian Lupu shall be elected as president. Afterwards, Mihai Ghimpu, chairman of the Liberal Party, will substitute him chairman of the parliament.

Whether this coalition is really weatherproof and can offer a possible end to the country's political crisis remains to be seen. The new AIE configuration will only achieve success if – unlike in the past – all the coalition partners make it a priority to work towards this success using all their political will and skills. The country's geopolitical, political and economic situation means there will be no lack of challenges which could rapidly bring the coalition to an end. In concluding, three of these dangers are mentioned below.

Firstly, the coalition does not have the majority required to elect a President in Parliament. Failure to do this will once again result in new parliamentary elections. There are three possible scenarios for the successful election of the President:

1. The AIE manages to persuade two Communist Party MPs to vote for the AIE candidate, Marian Lupu.
2. The AIE unites with the PCRM to elect Lupu as President, by giving the Communists concessions or by playing on the PCRM's well-founded fear that it could lose yet more seats in early elections.
3. The coalition gets around the election of a President in Parliament by making renewed efforts to change the system of voting.

After the history of failed election attempts in recent years, it is advisable to avoid trying to predict how future Presidential elections will play out.

The deterioration in the coalition's working relationships does not augur well for the local elections and particularly for the election to the important position of Mayor of Chișinău.

A second risk factor is the local elections due in summer, which will doubtless place additional strain on the coalition. The deterioration in the coalition's working relationships, something which was obvious before the parliamentary elections of November 2010 and the concurrent positioning for possible direct presidential elections after the referendum, does not augur well for the local elections and particularly for the election to the important position of Mayor of Chișinău. All three coalition partners have already declared that they want their own candidate to stand for office.

Finally, the financial interests of political protagonists could also be a stress factor for the coalition. The new Parliament includes a large number of businesspeople who, it is hoped, will use their professional experience to improve conditions for business. But it is also feared that some of these businesspeople have gone into politics in order to further their own financial interests, which could lead to non-political conflicts of interest between coalition partners.

All these risk factors lead us to fear that the country's political crisis is not yet over. Moldova's Western partners would be well advised to continue keeping a close eye on the country's political evolution and to do what they can to help promote democracy and good governance, so the current government will be in office for a full mandate of four years.