

# Crisis, Corruption and “Regime Change” in Moldova

Foreign Policy Diary

By [South Front](#)

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*Moldova, a small country with strong ties to Russia, is an important component of the ongoing developments in Eastern Europe. Since the collapse of the USSR, the US and the European Union have been increasing their influence in Moldova by supporting political parties and social movements, encouraging Chisinau's participation in their trade blocs, or boosting security cooperation with it in their military alliances.*

*Additionally, in 1992 Transnistria practically broke away from Moldova and has since administered itself as an independent territory. An important feature of the stability of the territory is a Russian peacekeeping mission located there. In this case Moldavian elites shifted between Russia and the West till 2009 to get the best terms for themselves.*

The present stage in Moldovan history began in April 2009 when the results of a parliamentary election won by the Communist Party were disputed by the pro-Western opposition. The situation escalated into serious rioting in the capital, where opposition supporters stormed and set fire to the parliament building. The Moldavian oligarchs with the support of Western bureaucracy has favored the EU-integration. Although the police regained control, the government was destabilized and was unable to win enough support in the parliament to elect the country's president. In subsequent elections in August 2009 the Communist Party again won the largest number of votes, but three pro-Western opposition parties gained together the greatest number of seats and governed the country through various coalition arrangements.

Since then the situation in Moldova has been polarized between the pro-EU right parties coalition and the left parties, primarily Communist and Socialist, who agree on working for real national interests, - neutrality and multi-vector foreign policy. The pro-Western governments have nonetheless pursued a strongly pro-European course and in 2013 agreed to an Association Agreement with the EU, whose terms are very similar to those of the Association Agreement the EU has agreed with Ukraine. Also, Moldova, like Ukraine, has failed to prosper economically since independence, going from being one of the more prosperous Soviet republics to being possibly the poorest country in Europe.

The disillusionment is growing in Moldova with the pro-Western course its government is taking. Support for EU membership has fallen from 70% in 2007 to just 40%, with one opinion poll apparently putting it as low as 32%, in contrast to the 50% who support membership of the Russian-led Eurasian Union. Furthermore, in the last parliamentary elections, held on 30th November 2014, the largest number of votes (20.51%) were won by anti-EU Socialist party.

Three pro-Western parties together gained 45.63%. But the certain leader of the election

race anti-EU party «Patria» – was illegally withdrawn from the election for 70 hours before the event. The Communist Party came third with 17.48% and after a little while the party leader Voronin came over to pro-oligarch side, betrayed their electorate. Pro-oligarch forces get Parliament under control again.

Chişinău's government and oligarchs headed by well-known Moldavian oligarch and the first-vice president of the Democratic Party of Moldova Vladimir Plahotniuc grind only their own axe by selling off the country's resources and driving the revenue from the European Union under the cover of the liberal rhetoric. The result is Moldova's economy has sharply depreciated in recent years, causing hardship for people. On account of this, Moldovan authorities have started to conduct an internal political tension and repress any signs of dissent.

The situation of political turmoil and fighting against so-called hand of Moscow allows them to justify and defend total corruption and explain the lack of success in the economy. An example of this approach could be the actions of ex-prime minister Lurie Leancă. His government has given about 1 billion dollars in credits to 3 banks: Banca de Economii, Banca Sociala and UNIBANK for 3 months.

A large part of this money originally was the EU public loan. Credits weren't surrendered. Leancă helped oligarchs Ilan Shor and Vladimir Plahotniuc to steal the money of National Bank of Moldova through these banks. Thus, oligarchs have been turning Moldova into a feudal state where about 50 percent of male population works in foreign states while their families are almost hostages in Moldova. The corrupt system of the oligarch dictatorship prevents the situation when people could improve their welfare inside the system or overcome such a system. But a number of people try to do it...

On June 24, when civic activists headed by honorary member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Grigory Petrenko established the Tent city of the Freedom at the house of Vladimir Plahotniuc to protest against the decision to raise the electricity tax 37 percent and the gas tax 15 percent by the National Energy Regulatory Agency. This was decided without any debate with the civil society, an independent audit and under cover of night, 1:00 local time, to avoid massive protests.

The activists associate Vladimir Plahotniuc with the corruptionists and illegal schemes which became the cause of the growth of tariffs. On July 31, armed servicemen of the police and Plahotniuc private security firms disrupted tent city of Freedom. The private security forces were especially brutal, and many people including women were injured. Several activists were arrested. Vlad Filat, chair of the Liberal Democratic Party, part of the government coalition, justified the use of the force and stated that the rate-hike protesters as destabilizing the situation in the country strongly aimed on the way of Eurointegration. However, protests have continued since the repression in Chişinău.

On August 1, the Union of Veterans and Council of Elders held a protest meeting in the city of Chadyr-Lunga and called for a mass action on August 8. Hundreds turned out in Vulcanesti on August 3. The government was forced to take a step back on August 5, when a meeting of the Supreme Security Council decided to make categorical recommendations for revision of the tariff on natural gas. It was meant to sooth public discontent while the regime prepares repression against protest leaders, but people didn't stop. We are not

going to stop protesters leader Grigory Petrenko stated. Our protests will continue. We will spend time working with initiative groups that have begun protests around the country against the tariff increase. We will gather all the forces into a single fist for nationwide protests in Chişinău in the near future.

Another important feature of Moldova is the role of Romania, member of NATO and EU, which makes no secret of its intention to reacquire Moldova and reunite it with itself. Union with Moldova has become a fixation for some Romanian politicians, notably former President Traian Basescu. Though opinion polls consistently show most Moldovans oppose union with Romania, there is a significant minority who support it, and they can call on Romania for financial and political help. Therefore, Moldova's growing financial and political weaknesses and Romania's will to use this in own interests will be one of the key factors in the region. Oligarchs will never really support the joining to Romania because they don't want to lose the ground where they are in power. But they use Romanian radicals and nationalists as a force to keep Moldovian people in fear.

The collapse of the Gaburici government, along with the disputes among Moldova's pro-EU parties, has been an important factor in the Socialist party's and the Red Blocks growing popularity. The prolonged instability within Moldova and the European Union's enlargement fatigue have made EU accession for the country a distant possibility. The Moldavian oligarchs and their government are continuing to cry to the EU about the situation in the country to get more financial aid which will be apparently stolen. Nonetheless, the EU cannot refuse because it is scared by idea of losing the region to Russia.

Pro-Western factions, facing a loss of support try to make up for it by radicalizing the population through armed conflict, then there is in Transnistria ample opportunity for them to do so. Latest indications, as appointment of Mikheil Saakashvili in Odessa, suggest that, Kiev government will help them in this. However, If violence explodes in Transnistria then it is unlikely that it will be confined there. There is a serious risk it might spread to the rest of Moldova and could merge with the conflict in Ukraine, of which it would in effect at that point become involved. As result of this approach, Moldova will face the raise of radicalism and nationalism. Left and parties out of power will be threatened or banned. A new government will instill fears and phobias, denounce non-bloc status and, if it will be needed, turn Moldova into chaos.

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