

The Evolution and Features of the Post-Totalitarian Political Regime in the Republic of Moldova

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In the 22 years which are the object of our analysis, the successors of the former single party, some reformed, others less so, ruled the Republic of Moldova for over 18 years.

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The Evolution of the Post-Totalitarian Political Regime

IN THE more than twenty years that are the focus of our analysis, and which have by and large passed since the Declaration of Independence, six governments have successively been in power in the Republic of Moldova: the agrarian-frontist government (1990–1994); the agrarian-socialist government (1994–1998); the center-right Alliance for Democracy and Reforms government (1998–1999); the Dumitru Braghiș transitional government (1999–2001); the communist (restoration) government (2001–2009); the center-right Alliance for European Integration government (2009–2012).

A simple comparative analysis reveals, on the one hand, that throughout most of this period (18 years), the Republic of Moldova was governed by left-wing and extreme left-wing parties, while only

for a very short period of time (4 years) it was governed by center-right democratic parties.

This demonstrates, on the other hand, that in this whole period there was a strong confrontation between two diametrically opposed currents concerning the Republic of Moldova's development: one, of neo-communist resistance, has for a long time opposed the democratic processes and the establishment of the rule of law, concomitantly opting for the country's stay in the Russian sphere of influence; the other, of democratic progress, has as its fundamental objective the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the pan-European structures, as suggested by the names of the two center-right governments.

Unfortunately, the first trend has dominated this period, causing the Republic of Moldova to lose precious time, both concerning the democratization of society and EU integration.

Coming back to the post-totalitarian governments, some considerations are necessary in order to make the evolution and characteristics of the post-Soviet regime in the Republic of Moldova clearer.

One should state from the very beginning that in the Republic of Moldova, as in the other Soviet republics, there were no democratically-oriented political forces. These were created in the last period of the totalitarian regime, while the civil society was not organized. A movement with a more national character was formed under the name of the People's Front of Moldova (PFM), although it was unable to assume power all by itself.

As a result, in the power vacuum created by the collapse of the totalitarian regime, certain non-doctrinal political formations appeared, under various names such as *Viața Satului* (Village Life), *democrații* (the democrats), *Sovietskaia Moldova* (Soviet Moldova) and *Budjak*. Unlike the *democrats*, who actually included some PFM representatives, the other three political movements were formed of former Soviet apparatchiks, kolkhoz and sovkhoz chairmen, Transnistrian and Gagauz separatists, most of them Russian-speaking and Russophile.¹

In the absence of political pluralism and of a legal and democratic institutional framework, representatives of the abovementioned groups modified the Soviet Constitution, allowing the organization of more or less free and democratic alternative elections. These took place between 25 February and 10 March 1990. A quasi-democratic parliament resulted, still preserving the totalitarian name of Supreme Soviet. Approximately 84% of its members came from the Communist Party of Moldova, many of them top level apparatchiks of the Central Committee.²

As none of the political movements managed to obtain a majority, an ad hoc alliance was created between the Village Life members of parliament, also known as agrarians, and the representatives of the PFM, who shared the main positions in the state administration. The first post-totalitarian government, lead by Mircea Druc, was invested on 25 May 1990. As expected given this alliance

of opportunity, the cooperation between the two groups could not last too long. Actually, the agrarians concluded this alliance with the PFM only in order to calm the spirits in the streets until they could secure the support of the other two political movements, to which they felt more connected due to their shared Soviet political past. Consequently, after only one year, the Druc government supported by the PFM was dismissed while the Front went into the opposition by the end of 1991. At the beginning of 1993, the other PFM representatives were dismissed from their leading positions in Parliament, the power being fully taken over by the agrarians, led by Mircea Snegur, the first president of the Republic of Moldova. They received precarious and conditional parliamentary political support from the other two neo-communist political groups. In other words, the descendants of the former communist totalitarian regime returned to power, this time in a so-called democratic garb.

Although it had a semi-totalitarian character, the first agrarian-frontist government also represented a step forward for the political future of the Republic of Moldova. This consisted of the development of political pluralism, 26 parties and socio-political organizations being registered at the end of 1993. There was even a split inside the Front between the moderate wing, represented by the Bessarabian political elite, and the radical wing concentrated around Iurie Roșca, which resulted in the division of this far-reaching popular movement and the creation of two parties known as the Congress of Intellectuals and the Christian Democrat Popular Front (CDPF).

In the same period, Moldova was a parliamentary republic for a year and three months, its first president, Mircea Snegur being elected by the Supreme Soviet on 3 September 1990. Later, taking the example of Boris Yeltsin and other leaders of former Soviet republics, Snegur demanded and obtained the introduction of a presidential regime. The regime change occurred after the 8 November 1991 elections, which he won, running unopposed, with 98.18% of the total votes. He had a 5-year mandate.

Yet, only approximately two and a half years later, the powers of the president were to be widely restricted through the provisions of the Republic of Moldova's first democratic Constitution, adopted by Parliament on 29 July 1994. The fundamental law practically introduced a semi-presidential regime, similar to the one in Romania and other European countries.

With support from a parliamentary majority of opportunity, the agrarians managed to end the four year mandate of the neo-communist government installed in 1990 and prepare new parliamentary elections. For the first time in the recent history of the Republic of Moldova, these elections were free and democratic, taking place in the context of political pluralism and of a modern electoral law which stipulated, beside voters' rights, a 4% electoral threshold. The campaign for the elections to be held on 27 February 1994 involved 13 parties

and electoral alliances of the 26 registered, as well as 20 independent candidates. Controlling all levers of power, the agrarians, this time organized in the Democratic Agrarian Party of Moldova (DAPM), won with 43.18% of votes cast, meaning 56 seats of the total 104. Three other electoral alliances entered the first democratically elected Parliament: the Socialist Party of Moldova (SPM) and the Unity–Edinstvo Movement (U–EM): 28 seats; the Bloc of Peasants and Intellectuals (BPI): 11 seats; the Christian Democrat Popular Front Alliance (CDPFA): 9 seats. As they only had a simple majority which didn't ensure the adoption of organic laws of national importance, the agrarians concluded an alliance with the members of the Russophile socialist parliamentary group. The resulting agrarian-socialist majority thus held 84 seats of the total 104, the remaining 20 belonging to the opposition.

The first democratic Parliament also played the role of Constituent Assembly, adopting the first Constitution of the Republic of Moldova on 29 July 1994. Although it is a modern fundamental law inspired by the French Constitution, it contains a gross scientific and historic untruth. Thus, despite the evident Romanian identity of the majority population of the Republic of Moldova and the language spoken by it, the Constitution includes false concepts like *Moldovan people* and *Moldovan language*. It must be mentioned that, fearing a totally negative result, as well as due to the agrarian-socialist majority's totalitarian mentality, the Constitution was not subject to the approval of the people through a referendum, being adopted only by Parliament, as was the procedure with fundamental laws in totalitarian communist regimes.

The second agrarian government, supported by its socialist allies, both partners having deep roots in the single communist party, caused considerable delays in the introduction of democratic reforms and the establishment of the rule of law, and showed inconsistency and even resistance in promoting economic reforms.

The first complete electoral cycle in the contemporary history of the Republic of Moldova ended with the first democratic presidential elections that took place on 17 November 1996. Although 9 candidates entered the race, the political struggle took place between 3 protagonists: Mircea Snegur, the incumbent president, Petru Lucinschi, Parliament speaker and Andrei Sangheli, the prime minister. In the first round, M. Snegur and P. Lucinschi, both former top-level Soviet apparatchiks, obtained 38.75% and 27.66% of the votes, respectively, Prime Minister A. Sangheli being left outside the race. The second round was a mere formality for P. Lucinschi as most of M. Snegur's opponents gave him their votes. He won the elections with 54.02% of all votes cast, becoming the second president of the Republic of Moldova. According to an agreement concluded prior to the elections between Petru Lucinschi and the acting Prime Minister A. Sangheli, the latter presented his resignation. The new head of state appointed Ion Ciubuc—with whom he had worked closely together in the days of the

totalitarian regime—as prime minister on 16 January 1997. In the absence of parliamentary support, President P. Lucinschi and P.M. Ion Ciubuc, sworn in on 24 January 1997, were forced to accept a government formula in which 70% of the former Sangheli cabinet ministers were reconfirmed, the other 30% of positions being assigned to people close to the two high-ranking state officials. It was for the first time that a president of a different political orientation had to cohabitate with an agrarian-socialist majority, until the end of its term or, to be precise, for almost a year.

THE FIRST alternation in government in the post-totalitarian history of the Republic of Moldova occurred in 1998, following the March 22 parliamentary elections.³ 11 political organizations, or indeed 5 political parties and 6 electoral alliances, entered the electoral race. Of these, only 4 managed to pass the electoral threshold and enter the new Parliament: the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM): 30.08% of votes or 40 seats; the Democratic Convention of Moldova (DCM): 19.31% of votes or 26 seats; the Bloc for a Prosperous and Democratic Moldova (BPDM): 18.12% of votes or 24 seats; the Democratic Forces Party (DFP): 8.86% of votes, meaning 11 seats.

The elections caused two enormous surprises. The first was the crushing defeat of the former governing party, the organizer of the elections, which didn't even manage to gain representation in the Parliament, and later disappeared from the political stage. The second surprise was the victory of the communists, direct successors of the former Soviet totalitarian party, who had meanwhile returned on the political stage under a new name.

In this situation, President P. Lucinschi was constrained to choose between two options: either to appoint a candidate for the position of prime minister from the majority parliamentary group of the communists, or to appoint a so-called independent person, which would get the support of a majority political coalition, consisting of the three anticommunist forces in parliament. In both cases the creation of a coalition was necessary, because none of the parties could ensure a parliamentary majority. Unwilling to be accused of having brought the communists back into power, even if he felt closer to them due to his political past, P. Lucinschi chose the second option. In spite of his constant disapproval of the majority coalition which involved parties other than the communists, known under the name Alliance for Democracy and Reforms (ADR), the head of state took advantage of the misunderstandings between the constituent parties regarding the future prime minister and re-appointed acting prime minister Ion Ciubuc on 6 May 1998. Thus the parliamentary majority was faced with a *fait accompli*, its constituent parties having to settle with the other positions, divided according to the algorithm established by the ADR founding Agreement.

The Ciubuc II government received the vote of investiture from the Parliament on 21 May 1998, with the votes of 59 of the 61 members of the parliamentary majority. Patriot Ilie Ilașcu, elected on the lists of the DFP, did not have the chance to vote as he was held in a Tiraspol prison. The loss of the prime ministerial position, which should have belonged to the DCM according to the algorithm, made the relations between this organization and P.M. Ion Ciubuc tense and fragile *ab initio*. Therefore, towards the end of 1998, the idea to withdraw the political support granted to the premier became increasingly popular in the DCM. Similar ideas were shared by the other two components of the majority, the Bloc for a Prosperous and Democratic Moldova and the DFP.

The tensions between the Alliance and the prime minister were also fueled by his weak performance in promoting economic reforms, his lack of credibility with the international financial organisms, as well as due to the severe economic crisis that Moldova had to face after the collapse of the Russian ruble and the drastic decrease of Moldovan exports to Russia. These were actually the causes that determined Ion Ciubuc to present his resignation to the president on 1 February 1999, which meant the fall of the whole government and cleared the way for the formation of a new cabinet. This new political perspective led to a sharpening of disputes between the two components of the DCM—The Renaissance and Conciliation Party of Moldova (RCPM) and the CDPF—regarding the appointment of a single candidate for the vacant position of prime minister. The immediate consequence was that M. Snegur, RCPM president, gave up his position as parliamentary majority leader. The medium term consequences included the disintegration of the DCM and implicitly the loss of the parliamentary majority, following the withdrawal of the CDPF from the ADR.

After a failed attempt to impose Kishinev Mayor Serafim Urechean as prime minister, P. Lucinschi accepted, following the existing precedent, the candidacy of Ion Sturza, deputy P.M. and minister of economy and reforms in the dismissed Ciubuc II government, proposed by the CDPF and approved by the coalition. In other words, only one year after its creation, the governing coalition managed to impose its own candidate for prime minister. Nevertheless the new cabinet faced big difficulties from the very beginning, as the CDPF, although not leaving the coalition, withdrew its political support, motivating their decision through the presence in the new government of too many ministers suspected of corruption or with doubtful reputations. In these conditions, the “golden vote” of Ilie Ilașcu, cast by him in written form from the prison in Transnistria, was necessary for the Ion Sturza government to be validated by Parliament on 12 March 1999.

The new government had a brief lifetime of about eight months. Its fate was sealed, on the one hand, by the departure from the parliamentary majority

of the CDPF and, on the other, by the initiative of President P. Lucinschi who, just like his predecessor, sought to transform the Republic of Moldova into a presidential republic. This amplified the disputes between the adversaries and the partisans of this issue in Parliament, determining the members loyal to the head of state to leave the parties of the ADR and declare themselves independent. As a direct consequence, at the end of 1999, the coalition lost the parliamentary majority, remaining with only 48 seats of the 101 possible, which could not provide a solid political support for Ion Sturza's cabinet.

Intending to regain political support, ADR leaders decided that it was necessary for the government to request a vote of confidence from Parliament on 4 November 1999. Contrary to their expectations, the parliamentary group of the communists, supported by CDPF members of Parliament and by the 11 independents, demanded a vote of no confidence, causing the dismissal of the Ion Sturza government. The reason for the vote of no confidence was the discontent of the 58 members of Parliament who voted for the motion with the economic reforms of the cabinet. This is how the first center-right, reformist government in the recent history of the Republic of Moldova ended its activity.

A short-term transition government followed for approximately a year and four months, being a democratic *intermezzo* before the return to power of the Soviet communists. President P. Lucinschi made three attempts to appoint a prime minister and form a new government, one of the candidates being communist leader Vladimir Voronin himself. These initiatives were rejected by a parliamentary majority of opportunity formed after the removal from power of the ADR.

Finally, on 21 December 1999, this speckled and heterogeneous majority gave a vote of confidence to appointed premier Dumitru Braghiș, the new cabinet, and its new program of governance. During this government, the confrontation between the Presidency and the Parliament on changing the political regime increased. The battle between the two leading state institutions was exacerbated after the approval by the legislature on 5 July 2005 of the law amending the Constitution and sanctioning the transition from a semi-presidential political regime to a parliamentary political regime, basically returning to the situation of 1990.

The failure of Parliament to elect a new head of state after four rounds of elections led to the dissolution of the legislature and the organization of the first early parliamentary elections, which would also lead to the election of the next president of the Republic of Moldova.⁴

Elections were set for 25 February 2001. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) registered 17 parties and electoral blocs, as well as 10 independent candidates. The electoral threshold rose from 4% to 6% for parties and electoral alliances, while the one for independent candidates was set at 3%. The CEC

presented the final results of the elections on 3 March 2001. They revealed the following situation: PCRМ: 50.23% of votes or 71 seats; the Braghiş Alliance: 13.45% of votes or 19 seats; the Christian-Democratic People's Party (CDPP, formerly CDPF): 8.18% of votes or 11 seats.

It was for the first time in the recent history of the Republic of Moldova that a political party obtained a crushing victory in the elections, and this was none other than the Party of Communists, resurrected from of its own ashes, just like a Phoenix. This announced the return of the bolshevist communists to power, meaning, to a great extent and without exaggeration, the restoration of the old totalitarian regime. Therefore, for this reason also, the Republic of Moldova was a singular case in Europe and the world. The 71 communist seats of the total 101 allowed them to exert absolute control over the three main state institutions: Parliament, Presidency and Government. In the good totalitarian tradition, the new President Vladimir Voronin, elected on 4 April 2001, kept his position as secretary-general of the Party of Communists. The Parliament leadership and the new prime minister, Vasile Tarlev (an illustrious nobody), invested by the legislature on 19 April 2001, reported both on a state and on a party line to the leader of the state party, the equivalent of the single party of Soviet times. The low number of opposition seats basically cancelled its role in a democratic system, rendering it decorative, symbolical, a pale spot in a red Parliament. In order not to create excessive panic in the western democratic world as well as among the domestic public opinion, the communists accepted some representatives of the Braghiş Alliance in the structure of their first government, only to exclude them later on.

The communist restoration began with a governing program of "Economic Revival, a Ressurrection of the Country" devised by Vasile Tarlev's cabinet, based on the PCRМ and the Braghiş Alliance electoral platforms, which reinforced the role of the state in the economy and "a rigorous control of post-privatization." The Republic of Moldova's direction was to be "contemporary socialism," a direction detailed by Vladimir Voronin at the 4th Congress of the PCRМ (April 2001). In this context, he mentioned that the country's economy had been destroyed by the savage capitalism favored in the previous ten years by reformist governments, the only alternative for the "resurrection of the country" being the socialist one. The picture of the communist restoration was completed by the return to communist symbols. Even if the official state symbols were not yet replaced, a process to replace them with communist symbols began. Red flags with the hammer and the sickle and Lenin's portraits returned to the offices of new officials, regardless of their level, while the new leadership brought a pompous homage on 22 April 2001 to the "leader of the world proletariat." Communist paraphernalia were also present at the "high communist forum," where only

Russian was spoken and Communist Party representatives from 17 countries, among which the Russian Federation, Ukraine, China and Cuba were in attendance.

Along with the red restoration, the communists of Bessarabia proceeded to apply what they had learned best in the period of the bolshevist totalitarian regime, most of their leaders at a central or local level being elderly individuals, born, educated and trained along the lines imposed by the Soviet occupants and having nothing in common with democratic values. In a still fragile democracy, the communists had the fairly easy task of reintroducing a Soviet-type authoritarian regime, which would control all fields of socio-economic and political life in the Republic of Moldova.

For a firm application of their political objectives, the communists first of all consolidated the role of coercive law-enforcement structures, reviving the Soviet-era secret police and militia, this time dyed in democratic colors under the name of Intelligence and Security Service (ISS), and the gendarmerie that returned to the old practices of spreading fear and horror among the population. In its turn, the Prosecutor's Office became an instrument of harassment and torture in the hands of Kishinev leaders. Hostile to political pluralism, the restored communist regime unleashed, in the context of a total monopoly on power, a far-reaching, tough and constant campaign against its political opponents, especially against those of a liberal, pro-European orientation, including things such as police surveillance, decrial and denigration in the eyes of the domestic and international public opinion.

In the eight years of their rule in the Republic of Moldova, the communists governed in a discretionary manner, their party acting just like the single party from Soviet times. Democratic values such as human rights, freedom of the press and of expression, the independence of the justice system, freedom of assembly and many others were unfamiliar to the red governors, a lack of respect for these norms and their flagrant violations becoming commonplace.

Three important stages were distinguished in the political evolution of the restored communist regime:⁵ the 6 March 2005 general elections; the 3 and 17 June 2007 local elections; the 5 April 2009 general elections.

The 6 March 2005 general elections ended the first mandate of the communists, after they had come to power in democratic conditions, and constituted their first test in front of the electorate after four years in government. Although sufficient popular dissatisfaction had accumulated in the respective period, the authoritarian government still gave voters, especially those with a Soviet mentality, the feeling of a certain internal stability, both political and economic. Nevertheless, this situation did not exclude a certain degree of erosion of the restored communist regime. The elections proved exactly this, the communists

winning the elections, but with a score smaller than the one in 2001, this time getting only 56 seats⁶ out of the total 101, as opposed to 71 seats in the previous elections. The loss of the 15 seats deprived the communists of a full monopoly on power, at least 61 votes being necessary to elect the president.

In the context of the misunderstandings between the parties of the Democratic Moldova Bloc (DMB), one of the three parliamentary groups, Vladimir Voronin and Iurie Roșca, a faithful servant of Moscow, set up a cunning political diversion meant to ensure a new presidential mandate for the communist leader. Thus, under the pretext of potential economic sanctions applied by the Russian Federation⁷ against the Republic of Moldova, determined by Kishinev's refusal to accept the Kozak Plan to federalize Bessarabia, the two managed to convince Dumitru Diacov and Oleg Serebrian, the leaders of the Democratic Party and of the Social Liberal Party, components of the DMB, to support Vladimir Voronin's candidacy. The condition was for him to sign the Declaration regarding the political partnership meant to achieve the European integration of the Republic of Moldova.

The so-called political consensus between the PCRM and the DMB proved to be a great bluff, in the absence of firm guarantees from Vladimir Voronin that he would fulfill the commitments taken upon signing the Declaration. Later events proved that the communist leader not only failed to respect the said agreement, but even lead a tough campaign to discredit and suppress the opposition, drawing the Republic of Moldova even farther from the European democratic values. The only political leader spared by the red power was Iurie Roșca, who, in exchange for his services, was offered the position of Parliament vice-president. Actually, Vladimir Voronin declared publicly that Roșca was a trusty man in the true meaning of the word and a credible politician. Roșca did not wag.⁸

The entry of the red regime into a period of free fall was seen after the 3 and 17 June local elections. The communists lost the position of Kishinev general mayor, which was won by Liberal Party representative Dorin Chirtoacă, with 61.17% of the votes, as well as the majority in the Kishinev city council, which went to opposition parties. Although on a local level the communists won the local elections by 34.32%, the opposition parties and also the independent candidates won the majority of mayoral and local council seats. The change in the balance of power in the Kishinev Municipal Council and at national level to the detriment of the communists caused the communist government to pursue a tough confrontational policy in its relations with the opposition. The activity of the latter's local structures was obstructed, also through the non-allocation of necessary financial resources from the state budget, while its leaders were denigrated, discredited, harassed and declared public enemies.

The 5 April 2009 general elections were the great confrontation between the authoritarian communist regime and the democratic opposition. The electoral campaign took place in totally unequal conditions. The communist lead-

ership used all administrative levers, all financial and material state resources, including the public television, for electoral propaganda. In order to weaken the opposition and prevent the unification of its forces before the elections, the communist majority, supported by the CDPP, its loyal ally, changed the electoral code by raising the threshold needed to enter parliament from 5% to 6% and banning the creation of electoral alliances. Opposition party activists were forced, in totally unequal and undemocratic conditions, to carry out an electoral campaign from person to person, as well as through the few mass media outlets that they had access to. The electoral message of the opposition was modern and mainly targeted pushing the Republic of Moldova out of the communist decay and integrating it into the European structures.

The counting of votes showed that the PCRM had won the elections by 49.48% taking, coincidentally or not, 61 seats in the new Parliament, which represented the exact number of votes necessary to elect the head of state. The other votes were shared between three opposition parties: the Liberal Party: 13.13%; the Liberal Democrat Party: 12.43% and Our Moldova Alliance: 9.77%.⁹

Yet, the great surprise of the elections was the failure, for the first time since 1990, of the CDPP to enter the Parliament after having received only 3.04% of the votes. This was the price paid for supporting the communists and for the services provided to Moscow.

The leaders of the parliamentary opposition cried election fraud, demanded the annulment of the results and the organization of new elections. Their claims were supported by tens of thousands of people who came out into the streets beginning with 6 April, when the first preliminary data on the election results were released to the public. To suppress the revolt of the masses and to discredit the leaders of the parties who had entered the new Parliament, the communist leadership appealed to the infamous bolshevist-KGB methods of yesterday, staging, through secret police agents, the vandalizing of Presidency and Parliament buildings and hoisting the Romanian flag on top of them. Once the pretext created, the communist regime took police units and undercover ISS agents into the city's main square to bloodily crush the peaceful protest of the population. Hundreds were arrested, tortured and abused by law enforcement agencies. The tragic result of the excessively brutal intervention of the authorities was three dead and three missing.¹⁰

To calm the spirits, the communist regime only accepted a recount of the votes, but not also the verification of the electoral lists, as requested by the opposition parties who considered this to be the main method to prove fraud in the parliamentary elections. The recount was not attended by opposition party representatives, as a sign of protest. The 15 April 2009 vote recount showed the existence of a number of invalid votes that was larger than the one given by the Central Electoral Commission, which caused the communists to lose one seat

upon the redistribution, remaining with only 60 seats in the new Parliament. Although at first sight this didn't seem so important, the golden vote would decide the fate of the election of the new president of the Republic of Moldova.

Following a certain stabilization of the situation, the communist majority elected the leading bodies of the new Parliament, a process in which all 41 members of the parliamentary opposition refused to participate. Subsequently the president of the country had to be elected in order to form the new government. The communists delayed the procedure without justification, in the hope of getting the golden vote from the opposition. However, the attempts to negotiate with its representatives failed miserably. In these conditions, the red majority organized two formal voting rounds, on 20 May and 3 June respectively, to elect the head of state. In both of them the communists, as if fulfilling democratic norms, presented two candidates, such as acting Premier Zinaida Greceanii and stand-ins like Andrei Neguța and Stanislav Groppa. Every time, Z. Greceanii obtained 33 votes, the rest going to her "opponents." Both times, the opposition refused to participate in the vote in corpore. Following this situation, acting President Vladimir Voronin, who meanwhile had become speaker of Parliament, dissolved the recently elected Parliament and set early elections for 29 July 2009.

The electoral campaign of the communists for the early elections was very tough and aggressive, based on the accusations brought to the opposition of allegedly intending to destroy the independence of the Republic of Moldova. OSCE observers presented a report regarding the early elections on 29 July 2009 in which they incriminated the totalitarian practices of the communist regime and underlined the necessity "to continue democratic reforms for the reestablishment of public trust."¹¹

THE RESULTS of the early elections, announced on 31 June 2009, showed the defeat of the communists and the victory of the opposition parties. Although they obtained the highest number of votes, 44.69%, the communists received only 48 seats in the new Parliament, 12 less than in the 5 April elections, losing the parliamentary majority for the first time in the last eight years. The united opposition, formed of the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP), the Liberal Party (LP) and the Our Moldova Alliance (OMA), obtained 38.60% of the votes, respectively 40 seats. They were joined by another opposition party, the Democratic Party (DP) which entered the Parliament with 13 mandates (12.54% of the votes), thus totaling 53 seats out of 101.¹²

The election resulted in the disappearance from the political stage of the CDPP, lead by Iurie Roșca, which suffered two consecutive searing defeats, having received only 1.91% of the votes in the early elections, the lowest score in the history of this party. With a parliamentary majority of 53 seats and following intense and difficult negotiations, on 8 August 2009 the four opposition parties formed a

ruling coalition known as the Alliance for European Integration (AEI).¹³ The AEI Declaration of establishment had as its main objective the reestablishment of the rule of law in the Republic of Moldova, which meant a second de-communization of Bessarabia after that of the 1990s, along with the beginning of the movement for national revival and awakening of the Bessarabian Romanians.

According to the established algorithm, the leading positions in the state went to the LDP, which obtained the prime ministerial position, and the LP, which was given the position of Parliament speaker and implicitly the one of interim president of the Republic of Moldova, until the president's election by the Parliament. It is important to mention, in this context, that the position of president became vacant on 11 September 2009, Vladimir Voronin having presented his resignation. The position was assigned to Parliament speaker Mihai Ghimpu.

The Alliance formed a new government with Vladimir Filat, LDP leader, as prime minister and with 16 ministries and 8 agencies. He was invested by the new Parliament on 25 September 2009, when the governing program, titled "European Integration: Liberty, Democracy, Welfare" was also approved.¹⁴ On 10 November and 7 December 2009, two voting rounds to elect the president of the country by the Parliament took place. Both ended in failure, Mihai Ghimpu, LP leader and speaker of Parliament, being reconfirmed by the Constitutional Court as interim president of the Republic of Moldova.

The problem of electing the new head of state had to be solved before 16 June 2010, a term stipulated by the Constitution. Therefore, the parliamentary majority studied various legal possibilities to solve the issue, including negotiations with the parliamentary group of the communists in order to obtain the necessary votes. Yet, none of these brought any concrete results, which determined the parliamentary majority to take the decision of consulting the people regarding the election of the head of state through the direct vote of the people. The constitutional referendum¹⁵ took place on 5 September 2010, but its results were not validated because only 30.29% of the citizens with a right to vote turned up at the voting booths, the minimum necessary being one third of the people registered on the voting lists.

After this option wore out, the interim president dissolved the Parliament and announced early elections¹⁶ for 28 November 2010. Thirty-nine electoral competitors participated, but only 4 parties managed to enter the new parliament, their votes and seats being distributed as follows: PCRM: 39.34% of votes, 42 seats respectively; LDP: 29.42% of votes, equaling 32 seats; DP: 12.70% of votes or 15 seats; LP: 9.96% of votes corresponding to 12 seats.

The communists once again won the elections, but they did not have the necessary majority to form a government. At the same time, the elections resulted in the disappearance from Parliament of the Our Moldova Alliance, one of the

components of the previous parliamentary majority, as well as in a notable rise in the number of LDP seats. This was basically a repeat of the 2009 situation, when none of these parties had the necessary number of seats to form a majority. Only, this time, the PCRM had 6 seats less than it had in 2009, while the three other parties of the AEI had 6 additional seats.

In these conditions, the only option was a recreation of the AEI,¹⁷ which actually happened on 30 December 2010, a date when the Agreement to create the new AEI was signed by leaders of the three parties. According to it, Marian Lupu, the president of the DP, was given the position of Parliament speaker and at the same time the position of interim president of the Republic of Moldova, while Vladimir Filat, LDP president, was given the position of prime minister. The new AEI government, lead by Vladimir Filat, had a structure similar to the previous one, the 16 ministries being distributed as follows: LDP—7, DP—5 and LP—4. He was invested by the Parliament on 14 January 2011. The only issue left to be resolved was the one of electing the head of state by the Parliament, which had actually led to the organization of early parliamentary elections.

During 2011, the governing Alliance didn't find a solution to this problem, which maintained the political instability. Negotiations with the communists failed, as did the talks with a group of three members of Parliament who left the PCRM faction and submitted to the AEI an offer to vote for an apolitical candidate from outside the parliamentary majority as president.

In this situation, the Alliance decided to organize the first round of head of state¹⁸ elections, on 16 December 2011, supporting the candidacy of Marian Lupu, the interim president of the Republic of Moldova. He only got 58 votes of the 61 necessary, all from the Alliance. The communist members of Parliament didn't attend the vote, while the three communist dissidents voted against. The second round was programmed for 15 January 2012. After the first round, in order to dismiss any suspicions regarding potential secret talks between a party of the majority and the communists, the leaders of the AEI signed, on 17 December 2011, a Supplement¹⁹ to the Agreement to create the Alliance, excluding any separate negotiations and a common vote with the PCRM which would lead to the reconfiguration of the government and the creation of a new parliamentary majority.

Meanwhile, on 12 January 2012 to be precise, replying to a claim filed by a member of Parliament, the Constitutional Court²⁰ declared unconstitutional the 16 December 2011 presidential elections, because the secret of the vote had been breached. The same Court ruled that the Parliament's decision to establish repeat elections for 15 January 2012 was, therefore, also unconstitutional. Following this decision, Parliament was forced to start the procedure to elect the head of state from the beginning. AEI gave its own interpretation²¹ to the 12 January 2012 Constitutional Court Decision regarding the interruption of the process to elect

the head of state and called on 15 January 2012 an extraordinary meeting of the Parliament, during which the two decisions of Parliament were repealed.

On the same day, AEI leaders adopted the Declaration regarding the possible solutions to the constitutional crisis, meant to ensure political stability. Through it, the components of the governing alliance assumed their collective responsibility for the achievement of some major objectives on the political agenda for the following period, the most important one being a referendum for the modification of the Constitution with the purpose of giving citizens the possibility to correct the constitutional deficiencies that were causing interminable political crises in the Republic of Moldova. This would allow for the democratization and the simplification of the mechanism to elect the president by the Parliament with a simple majority and would have transformed the system of governance into an authentically parliamentary one. The referendum was supposed to take place no later than April 2012.

However, on 10 February 2012, the leaders of the AEI announced that they were coming back to electing the president in Parliament.²² The initiative to renounce the referendum belonged to the LDP and the DP, the LP being forced to comply with their decision. This was motivated by the fact that the referendum would have failed because of the pressures manifest in society. The interim president of the Republic of Moldova, Marian Lupu, indicated that the date of the presidential elections would most likely be made public on the occasion of the first winter session of Parliament, planned for 16 February 2012.

In this context, the three leaders stated that for the election of the president they would negotiate with the Dodon group of the three dissident communist members of Parliament. Regarding the potential presidential candidates, Vlad Filat specified that “We need a person of moral integrity,” liberal Mihai Ghimpu stating that the party he led would give up the Parliament speaker position that belonged to the LP according to the agreement, and would not present any candidates for the position of president of the Republic of Moldova. On the other hand, the AEI leader mentioned that the modification of the Constitution through the will of the people remained valid and an eventual referendum would take place before the end of the current legislature. “A number of articles in the supreme Law need to be modified and it is possible that we will return to adopting a new Constitution,” Vlad Filat concluded.

It is clear that the governing Alliance has proved incapable, in the two and a half years since it has been in power, to find a solution to the acute constitutional crisis faced by the Republic of Moldova. The causes of this incapability should be sought in the vanity of the AEI leaders, their lack of political will, and their incapacity to compromise in the national interest, although there have been opportunities for this.

Features of the Post-Totalitarian Political Regime

THE MAIN feature of the post-totalitarian political regime is that after the single party lost its monopoly on power, a more or less reformist part of the former communist nomenklatura scattered into a series of political groups which subsequently turned into parties specific for a democratic political regime. This category was represented especially by the DAPM, PFM and SPM, which dominated political life in the 1990–1998 period.

The toughest line of the totalitarian party, pursued by Vladimir Voronin and other Soviet activists, supported by the most bigoted and fanatical of party members, preserved control over local structures and, once the ban was lifted, started to climb the steps of power, managing to win all parliamentary elections from 1998 until 2010. Moreover, in 2001, the communists had a crushing victory in the elections, seizing the political power fully and on all levels, which allowed them to restore the totalitarian regime of Soviet origin for a period of 8 years, a singular case in Europe. It can thus be fully stated that in the 22 years which are the object of our analysis, the successors of the former single party, some reformed, others less so, ruled the Republic of Moldova for over 18 years.

Another feature consists of the fact that the center-right democratic parties proved to be pretty weak from a political standpoint, disunited and with very vain leaders. This made their accession to power difficult and the cooperation inside governing coalitions tense and precarious. For these reasons they stayed in government for short periods of time, not managing to end their mandates.

An important feature is that the post-totalitarian political regime had an especially tortuous evolution, which determined, especially in the later years of the period, a constitutional crisis, to which no solution was found by the end of 2012. Thus, following the quasi-democratic elections of 1990, a parliamentary political regime, was installed in the Republic of Moldova, lasting until the end of 1991 when, also as a consequence of elections, it was transformed into a presidential regime. The character of the regime was changed into a semi-presidential one after the adoption of the democratic Constitution in 1994. The conflict between the Presidency and the Parliament, which broke out in 1999 as a consequence of the head of state's wish to have his constitutional attributions extended, determined the members of Parliament to modify the Constitution and reintroduce, on 5 July 2000, the parliamentary political regime. During the communist restoration, having a solid parliamentary majority, the regime enjoyed stability. Following the loss of power by the communists and the takeover of government by a democratic political coalition, without a sufficient majority, the parliamentary

regime entered a constitutional crisis, determined by the impossibility to elect the president of the Republic of Moldova.

A characteristic thing is that in those 22 years, only one party, the Communist Party, was able to win the parliamentary elections (in 2001) in a categorical manner, which allowed it to form an absolute majority (over 2/3 of seats). In all the other elections, either pre-electoral alliances or post-electoral coalitions were necessary to form parliamentary majorities and form governments. Generally, only approximately four parties and pre-electoral alliances managed to pass the electoral threshold and enter the Parliament.

On the other hand, as another feature, it should be mentioned that, except for the 2005 and 2010 elections, which ushered in the second communist government and respectively the preservation of the AEI in power, all the other electoral confrontations were lost by the party/coalition which organized them. Moreover, in 1998, the DAPM didn't enter Parliament, later on disappearing from political life.

Usually election winners came to power following a negative vote given to the former government by the unsatisfied electorate, rather than through a debate on electoral platforms and projects deemed feasible and attractive for the population.

In the over 20 years of the current post-totalitarian political regime, there were periods of both political stability and instability. Thus, there were 8 parliamentary elections, of which 5 on term and 3 early elections (2001, 2009 and 2010). As regards government stability, the situation was considerably different, with 14 cabinets coming to govern in the respective period, which means an average of less than two years for each government. The longest period of parliamentary stability was registered during the communist restoration, when there were only three governments, of which the two lead by Vasile Tarlev were in power for 7 years (2001–2008).

Other features of the regime result from its very evolution and regard aspects like: the communist representation of approximately 84% of the first Parliament of the Republic of Moldova; the completion of a full electoral cycle; ensuring alternation in government; the cohabitation of a parliamentary majority of a certain political color with a president of a different political color; a successful vote of no-confidence by the opposition, albeit only once, as an instrument of parliamentary democracy.

The parliament members' migration from the opposition to the governing forces and vice-versa, depending on their opportunistic interests or on the blackmail exerted upon them by the leadership, did not take a significant dimension, but was nevertheless a reality with all parliamentary parties, including the communists.

The almost generalized corruption in the state administration, both central and local, and the low efficiency of specialized structures in fighting it is another feature of the post-totalitarian political regime.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the slow and very sinuous transition towards a democratic parliamentary regime in the past twenty years or so has positioned Moldova in one of the last places among the central and eastern-European countries with fragile democracies, due largely to lingering totalitarian mentalities. The transition to the new regime was marked by the exponential growth of social inequalities, the aggressive and generalized corruption on all levels of society, by a state with politicized and inefficient institutions, as well as by a political and intellectual self-interested, manipulated and decadent pseudo-elite. □

Notes

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3. Dorin Cimpoeșu, *Guvernarea de centru-dreapta în Basarabia (Republica Moldova), 1998–1999* (Bucharest: Renaissance, 2009), 17–176.
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5. Dorin Cimpoeșu, *Republica Moldova între România și Rusia, 1989–2009* (Kishinev: Casa Limbii Române Nichita Stănescu, 2010), 248–261.
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Abstract

The Evolution and Features of the Post-Totalitarian Political Regime in the Republic of Moldova

The study analyses the political governments in the recent history of Bessarabia (Republic of Moldova): the agrarian-frontist government (1990–1994); the agrarian-socialist government (1994–1998); the center-right Alliance for Democracy and Reforms government (1998–1999); the Dumitru Braghiș transitional government (1999–2001); the communist (restoration) government (2001–2009); the center-right Alliance for European Integration governments (2009–2012). The author attempts, for the first time, to define and chronologically frame the first governing regimes in the history of Bessarabia (Republic of Moldova) following its separation from the Soviet Empire and its declaration of independence. The paper also presents the features and characteristics of every governance; the political struggle for power and the political programs of the parties involved; the evolution of the local multi-party system; the emergence of the constitutional state and of a market economy; the adoption of the internal legislative framework; the orientation of the foreign policy; the management of the political and identity crises; the involvement of Russia in domestic policy; the accomplishments and failures of the six regimes, as well as many other aspects.

Keywords

Bessarabia, political parties, post-Soviet era, communist restoration