



MOLDOVA: Vote boosts democracy but prolongs gridlock

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EVENT: The governing Alliance for European Integration (AEI) narrowly defeated the opposition Communist Party in the November 28 parliamentary elections.

SIGNIFICANCE: Moldova has been in political deadlock since two previous elections failed to produce a coalition capable of electing a president; the latest polls were the fourth national elections in less than two years. The results will give the AEI 59 seats in parliament, two short of the three-fifths majority needed to elect a president. Barring political defections, the country may have to hold yet another round of early elections.

ANALYSIS: With all votes counted, the Central Electoral Commission's tally shows that four parties will surpass the 4% threshold to enter parliament:

- The Communist Party came in first with 39% of the vote, and is expected to hold 42 seats.
- It was followed by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Prime Minister Vlad Filat, with 29% (32 seats).
- The Democratic Party of former Communist and former Alliance for European Integration (AEI) presidential candidate Marian Lupu received 13% (15 seats).
- Finally, the Liberal Party of acting President Mihai Ghimpu and Chisinau Mayor Dorin Chirtoaca received 10% (12 seats).

The other 16 political parties, including AEI member Our Moldova Alliance, will not be represented, nor will the 19 independent candidates.

Search for coalitions. One of two potential coalitions is likely to emerge, namely:

- a re-establishment of the AEI between the LDP, Democratic Party and Liberal Party; or
- a centre-left coalition between the Communists and Lupu's Democratic Party.

Any other configuration seems unlikely: the LDP and the Liberal Party have categorically ruled out any compromise with the Communists. These parties are hesitant to repeat the mistakes of the Christian Democratic People's Party, which formed a coalition with the Communists in 2005 and subsequently lost much of its electoral support.

Of the possible coalitions, a re-establishment of the AEI is most likely. On November 30, Communist leader and former President Vladimir Voronin announced his party would be willing to form a coalition with the Democratic Party or the LDP. However, the LDP's Filat rejected this option and committed his party to the goal of 'a Moldova without Communists'. Senior figures in the Democratic Party, as well as Ghimpu, have said they would support the re-establishment of the AEI. This means that the outcome of coalition negotiations is likely to depend heavily on Lupu's political preferences ([see MOLDOVA: Former Communist emerges as kingmaker - August 26, 2009](#)).

Presidential stalemate. A compromise between the Communists and the AEI will be difficult to reach unless the AEI concedes certain policy priorities and senior positions in the new parliament and government. These concessions are unlikely; as such, any realistic potential coalition will fall short of the 61 seats necessary to elect a president. Unless some deputies defect, the ruling coalition will be able to form a government, but will have to appoint an acting president -- much like the position before the election.

This has been a problem in Moldova for over 18 months:

- After the April 2009 elections, the Communists controlled 60 deputies, but the other political parties claimed that the Communists had rigged the vote. They thus boycotted the presidential voting process in parliament.
- Snap elections in July 2009 deprived the Communists of their parliamentary majority and led to the formation of the AEI. Five Communists defected to support Lupu for president, but the vast majority of Communist deputies boycotted the election in parliament, preventing Lupu from winning enough votes to take office.
- In September 2010, a popular referendum was held on amending the constitution and allowing direct election of the president in tandem with early parliamentary elections. While the referendum appeared to have strong support among reform-minded segments of the electorate, the Communists led a boycott of

the popular vote. This, combined with general voter apathy, meant that the referendum failed to surpass the 33% turnout threshold needed to be considered valid (see [MOLDOVA: Referendum campaign previews challenges ahead - August 20, 2010](#)).

Reform barrier? Though the AEI has won praise for restoring relations with the IMF and solidifying ties to the EU, its inability to elect a president has undermined its authority and served as a persistent barrier to more ambitious reforms. If, as seems likely, the new parliament is unable to elect a president, the constitution mandates yet another round of early elections. The stalemate is almost certain to revive debate about amending the constitution either to reduce the size of the parliamentary majority required to elect a president, or to establish direct popular presidential elections.

Democratic gains. Although the new elections failed to break the deadlock, they did showcase substantial improvements to the democratic process. The elections were monitored by more than 300 international observers from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other groups. Observers and officials were generally positive about the election's administration, the diversity of candidates and parties, respect for civil liberties and media freedom:

- The head of the European Parliament's delegation, Monica Macovei, remarked that the elections were a clear improvement, contributing to perceptions that Moldova has been the most successful participant in the EU's Eastern Partnership (see [EU/CIS: Eastern Partnership is running out of steam - September 20, 2010](#)).
- Similarly, the head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation called the elections a positive step in Moldova's democratic development.
- The Central Electoral Commission and the Interior Ministry released a statement calling the elections among the fairest in the last decade, noting that they registered half the irregularities of previous elections.

Despite these improvements, there were several complaints about irregularities and democratic shortcomings. In particular, the OSCE was critical of the government's recent introduction of a new mandate system favouring small political parties. It also noted persistent problems with voting lists, but evaluated positively government plans to centralise the lists by 2011.

International implications. The re-establishment of the AEI would have significant implications for Moldova's international relations. As its name suggests, the coalition of the LDP, Democratic Party and Liberal Party is very pro-Western (see [MOLDOVA: AEI scores early foreign policy successes - December 4, 2009](#)).

Several Western states and institutions attempted to bolster the governing parties' electoral prospects:

- On November 18, the US Senate approved a resolution recognising Moldova's extraordinary progress in its transition from an 'authoritarian' government.
- Germany reportedly played an important role in convincing Romania to agree to a long-delayed border treaty with Moldova, which was signed on November 8.
- On November 24, the European Parliament consented to Moldova's participation in several programmes and agencies.
- The next day, EU foreign ministers asked the European Commission to prepare the directives for a comprehensive free-trade agreement with Chisinau.

While European integration played a smaller role in this campaign than in previous elections, the support of the United States and EU was unprecedented, and reflects the success of the current government in deepening relations with the West. It also reflects Western governments' distance from the Communists, who changed their previously European-oriented platform to an agenda that emphasises equidistance between the West and Russia.

CONCLUSION: While the existing electoral system appears to be unsustainable, so far, there has not been a groundswell of popular support for sweeping reform. Voters' relative lack of concern suggests that while repeat rounds of elections are hindering some aspects of domestic policy-making, there is little risk of serious political instability.

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