

MOLDOVA: NEVER ENDING ROAD TO A NEVER ACHIEVED DEMOCRACY

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Moldova is a small country, situated in Southeastern Europe, between Ukraine and Romania. The population was 4,400,000 as of 2002, of which 65 percent are Moldovans, 14 percent are Ukrainians, 13 percent are Russians and other groups such as Jews, Bulgarians, Roma and Gagauz. The predominant religion is Eastern Orthodox (98 percent) and the rest is Jewish (1.5 percent) and others. The most commonly spoken languages are Moldovan (Romanian), Russian and Gagauz.¹ There was a decline of the population, which was standing at 3,630,000 in 2013,² and 3,438,000 in 2018.³

Moldova became part of the Soviet Union in August 1940, having been previously ruled by Romania. For a short of period of time, Romania occupied Moldova during World War II, but then it was taken back by the Soviets. The country declared its independence from the USSR on August 27, 1991, a date which is now celebrated as a national holiday. Real independence was acquired on December 26, 1991, after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Russian forces, however, have remained on the Moldovan territory east of the Dniester River, even after Moldova's independence. These Russian forces support the Slavic majority population, which is mostly Ukrainians and Russians, who have proclaimed a "Transnistria" (Transdnier) Republic. One of the poorest nations in Europe, Moldova became the first former Soviet state to elect a Communist as its president in 2001. The per capita gross domestic product

¹ CIA. The World Factbook 2002 (www.cia.gov)

² CIA. The World Factbook, 2013. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/md.html>

³ CIA. The World Factbook, 2020. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/md.html>.

for the first 11 months of the year was \$406.00 (5,330 Moldovan lei), but this figure may have been considerably underestimated because of activities in the large shadow economy, which accounts for approximately two-thirds of the economy and the underreporting for tax purposes. According to government statistics, approximately 82 percent of the population lived below the officially designated “subsistence minimum.”⁴

The constitution of the country was adopted on July 28, 1994, and replaced the old Soviet constitution of 1979. It provides for a multiparty representative government with its power divided among the president, the cabinet, parliament, and the judiciary. In July 2000, Parliament amended the 1994 Constitution, by voting to transform the country into a parliamentary republic and changing the presidential elections from a popular vote to a parliamentary one. On April 4, 2001, the Parliament elected the Communist Party leader, Vladimir Voronin, as President. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; observers however, believe that judges have remained subject to outside influences and corruption. In fact, corruption, including political corruption, became one of the major features of Moldova’s political arena.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For many centuries, Moldova was the victim of frequent warfare. The main reason was Moldova's important location - a historic passageway between Asia and Europe. Romans, Huns, Tatars, Turks, Hungarians, Germans, and many others passed through that land known as “The Gate” between the Carpathians and the Black Sea, which in the 13th century became part of the Mongol Empire. Moldova emerged as an independent state in the 14th century. The first document

⁴ Kate Randall Warnings of famine and starvation in the former Soviet Union Red Cross and Red Crescent Report 10.07.98 (<http://www.wsws.org/news/1998/oct1998/rus-o07.shtml>)

referring to the “Land of Moldova” dates back to 1359 AD. In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire conquered the Moldova Principality. The Turkish yoke lasted for almost 300 years. However, Romanians always claimed this land as theirs. It led to conflicts and tensions in the region which, even today, impacts Moldova’s domestic and international policies.

After the Russian-Turkish War of 1806-1812, the eastern half of Moldova (Bessarabia) between the Prut and the Dniester Rivers was ceded to Russia, while today's Romanian Moldova (west of the Prut) remained under the Turks. Bessarabia became one of the provinces of the Russian Empire. Romania took control over the Russian half of Moldova in 1918 in the course of the Russian Civil War. The Soviet Union, however, never recognized the seizure and, in 1924, created the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic on the east side of the Dniester River as part of the Soviet Ukraine.

MAP OF MOLDOVA



<https://www.languagesoftheworld.info/russia-ukraine-and-the-caucasus/challenges-transnistrias-potential-ascension-russian-federation.html>

In August 1940, under the pressure of Nazi Germany, Romania handed its part of Moldova to the USSR. The Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic was established and declared a member of the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities carried out arrests and deportations of many Moldovans who were declared “bourgeois” and “nationalist” elements. The role of the Communist party became dominant in society, while other parties were outlawed.

During World War II, however, Moldova was occupied by Romanian forces as part of the Nazi Axis and was declared to be a part of Romania. After the war, this land was again annexed by the Soviet Union.

The Soviet government decided to divide the country and gave the southern and northern parts of Moldova to Ukraine and Transnistria to what is now the state of Moldova. In order to strengthen its presence in the country, the Soviet regime transferred thousands of ethnic Slavs to Moldova. As a result, during the 1950s, many Russian teachers, doctors and engineers were brought to Moldova. Thus the Soviet authorities carried out the “Russification” of Moldova. The Roman alphabet was replaced with a Cyrillic one.⁵ The Roman Orthodox Church was removed and Moldova’s believers went under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Soviet regime followed its policy of turning new provinces into “socialist nations” under full control of Moscow and the Communist Party.

POST-SOVIET DEVELOPMENTS

In the late 1980s, during the perestroika, the national liberation movements in Moldova began. On August 27, 1991, the Republic of Moldova declared its independence. This

⁵ Moldova Country Guide. History. (<http://www.moldova.4pla.net/page.php?pg=1>)

development resulted in the resurgence of Moldovan and Slavic nationalism. In 1991, Slavic separatist elements, assisted by the Russian military forces in the area, and led by supporters of the 1991 coup attempt in Moscow, declared a “Dniester Republic” in the area of the country that is located between the Dniester River and Ukraine. In 1992, after the declaration of independence, a war between the Moldovans and the Slavs broke out. The Slavs declared the establishment of the Transnistrian Republic, an entity not recognized by any other country.

The war ended after Russian forces intervened, and a truce has held since, although agreements to normalize relations have not been honored. Mediators from Russia, Ukraine, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have encouraged the two sides to reach a settlement that would preserve the nation's sovereignty and independence, while granting a measure of autonomy to Transnistria. Progress in resolving the ongoing conflict has been blocked by the continuing demands of the separatists’ for statehood and for recognition by the Chisinau leadership of a country consisting of a confederation of two equal states: Transnistria and right-bank Moldova.

ETHNIC CONFLICTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON POLITICS IN MOLDOVA

The peculiarities of the historical development of Moldova, connected with its geographical position on the cross roads between the East and the West, led to a very tense ethnic situation in the republic. The majority of the population of the largest part of country is ethnically Moldovan, who speak the Moldovan language. At the same time there are two regions in the country, where the situation is completely different: Transnistria, where the majority is the Russian-speaking Slavic population and Gagauz-Yeri, a Turkish-speaking Christian minority.

Both of those regions became the centers of instability, which, in the Transnistrian case, is being supported by foreign military intervention.

In 1989, the nationalistic Popular Front, advocating a union with Romania, came to power in Chisinau. The various non-Moldovan nationalities, comprising more than one third of the country's population, reacted with anxiety, and pursued separatist policies. On August 21, 1990, the Gagauzs announced the formation of the “Gagauz Republic” in the five southern *raioane* (districts) where their population was concentrated, separate from the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic and a part of the Soviet Union. The Transnistrians followed suit on September 2, proclaiming the formation of the “Dnestr Moldovan Republic,” with its capital in Tiraspol, as a part of the Soviet Union. Republic-level officials denounced these efforts as separatist and treasonable.

Under these circumstances, violence broke out in the fall of 1990. A decision by Gagauz leaders to hold a referendum on the question of local sovereignty was intensely opposed by the Moldovan government and by the Popular Front. Rival political forces mobilized volunteer detachments to defend their competing interests by force. Adding to the volatility of the conflict between the Gagauzs and the ethnic Moldovans, militia forces from Transnistria, entered the Gagauz region to support the sovereignty movement there. In the Transnistrian city of Dubasari, the militia seized the city council building as part of its preparations for a referendum on autonomy in the region. When the Moldovan police sought to retake the building, new forces were mobilized from ethnic Moldovan regions as well as from Russian-speaking regions. In the ensuing conflict, three people were killed and dozens more wounded.⁶

In March 1992, Moldova engaged in a short, but disastrous war with its eastern province of

⁶ Helen Fedor, ed. *Moldova: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995, <http://countrystudies.us/moldova/>

Transnistria. As efforts to mediate the conflict between Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, and Romania floundered and as the Transnistrian separatists consolidated their position with the support of the Russia's 14th Army, pressure built on President Snegur to take decisive action to resolve the conflict. In late March 1992, Snegur declared a state of emergency across the republic, and soon afterward the government made an effort to disarm the separatists' militia. These efforts were met by armed resistance, which, by May 1992, had escalated into a full-scale civil war, as weapons released to the Transnistrians by the 14th Army were used against Moldovan military units. By the close of the summer, more than 300 people had been killed in the conflict, and more than 1,000 had been wounded. A large part of the city of Bender, which had become a focal point of the conflict, had been devastated; thousands of refugees flooded out of the region⁷.

For the last decade, Russia has kept the leading role in the negotiations over the Transnistrian conflict. At the summit of the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OCSE) in Istanbul in 1999, Russia promised to withdraw its arms caches and troops from the region. But there had been little progress thus far. When the deadline for the withdrawal expired on December 31, 2002, the OSCE meekly agreed to extend it for another year. Moscow argues that its military presence guarantees peace and stability in the region. But it also guarantees the stability of the authoritarian regime in Transnistria, and Russia's indirect influence over all of Moldova.⁸

The lack of any progress in the Transnistrian settlement suggests the following: Either Russia is incapable of influencing Transnistria in order to stabilize the region, or Moscow has no interest in seeing the conflict settled.

The chances of a peaceful solution of the Gagauz question were much higher since the

⁷ Helen Fedor, ed. *Moldova: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995, <http://countrystudies.us/moldova/>

⁸ Nicu Popescu *Transnistria: The Old Conflict For The New Europe* Russia and Eurasia Review 03/18/03

mainstream of the self-proclaimed Gagauz leadership never questioned the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, except in the case of the latter's occasional union with Romania. But although Gagauzia is enjoying a special status, according to the 1994 constitution and the Gagauz Autonomy Act, the tensions are still present and sometimes reveal themselves in violent forms.

Today, Moldova controls Gagauzia's external relations as well as the region's defense. Gagauzia has dissolved its military organization and accepted the authority of the Moldovan Army. This authority extends to frontier protection, so Moldovan officials supervise Gagauzia's only frontier, that with Ukraine. The supreme authorities of Gagauzia are formally subordinated to those of Moldova, although the Bashkan of Gagauzia also assumes the position of vice-prime-minister of the Republic of Moldova and the Gagauz Peoples' Assembly enjoys the right to participate in both the domestic as well as in the foreign policy of the Moldovan Republic under the 1994 agreements.

Despite certain progress in resolving of the ethnic issues and conflicts on the territory of Moldova, the current government has made a series of significant mistakes that led to the strengthening of the tensions in the regions of Transnistria and Gagauz-Yeri. The complete resolution of the problem seems impossible at this point, without the interference of the international community and full cooperation of the Chisinau, which would mean revising the government's policy in this matter.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

The general instability in the country caused by the large separatist movement and a number of smaller ethnic and religious conflicts has led to the instability of the political system.

On April 5, 2009, the parliamentary elections in Moldova resulted in the Communist Party winning a majority of seats.⁹ Shortly after the results were announced, Moldova plunged into civil unrest, as the opposition refused to accept the results and accused the government of fraudulent elections. The capital city of Chisinau turned into an area where protesters organized demonstrations, which escalated on April 7, 2009.¹⁰ The police subdued the demonstrations by using excessive force which included beatings with police batons and torture during detention.¹¹ In violent actions taken by the Moldovan police, three protesters were killed, many were wounded and several hundred were arrested.¹²

The Moldovan police used unprecedented violence when quashing the April, 2009 demonstrations. Many participants were detained and subjected to torture and physical abuse. The former detainees claimed that at least three of the detained participants might have died in police custody as a result of torture and abuse.¹³

Despite the fact that the Communist president was ousted, the system of the government was not changed and it is reflected in the results of the only one case of investigation of police crackdown on the protesters: former police officer, Ion Perju, was acquitted of the suspected death of Valeriu Boboc, a young man killed in the Great National Square on the night of April 7 to 8, 2009.¹⁴ Thus, the death of a young democrat was not punished, as well as there was no punishment for other killings, injuries and suffering of democratic protesters.

⁹ Communists win Moldovan election, BBC News, April 6, 2009 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7984582.stm>

¹⁰ The protest initiative group: LDPM is the guilty one for the devastations in the Chişinău downtown, April 8, 2009, <http://omg.md/Content.aspx?id=2437&lang=2>

¹¹ Protect peaceful Moldovan protesters from police ill-treatment, Amnesty International Report, April 15, 2009, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/appeals-for-action/protect-peaceful-moldovan-protesters-police-ill-treatment>

¹² European Parliament. MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION. April 30, 2009. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B6-2009-0264&language=EN>

¹³ Moldova police face brutality allegations <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8007428.stm>

¹⁴ Ion Perju, accused of Valeriu Boboc's death, acquitted at first instance

Citește mai mult: [Ion Perju, accused of Valeriu Boboc's death, acquitted at first instance | News Moldova, video.](#)

The subsequent recount of the votes authorized by the Constitutional Court confirmed the accuracy of the result of the elections and revealed no serious errors.¹⁵

Under the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, the President is elected by the parliament with a majority of three fifths. Due to the discord, which paralyzed the parliament, the presidential elections of July 2009 ended in a fiasco: The opposition coalition, which was formed by the Liberal Party, the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova and by the “Our Moldova” Alliance, boycotted the elections. The situation was further aggravated by the dissolution of the Parliament.¹⁶

On July 29, 2009, early parliamentary elections took place in Moldova, again giving the Communist Party 45 percent of the seats¹⁷ which allowed the Communists to block the upcoming presidential elections as the Communist Party refused to accept Marian Lupu, who had stepped out of the Party to form the Alliance for European Integration.

The July 2009 parliamentary elections demonstrated that the Democratic Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, the Liberal Party and Our Moldova Alliance gained greater support, mainly because of the disturbingly nationalist agenda of Moldovan democrats. Mihai Ghimpu, a leader of the Liberal Party, Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament and acting President of the Republic of Moldova, clearly expressed his support of pan-Romanian views and nationalist agenda.

Specifically, he stated that the minority “Gagauzs are the ulcers on the body of the Moldovan

[news, online news | National Public Broadcaster "Teleradio-Moldova" http://trm.md/en/social/ion-perju-invinuit-de-moartea-lui-valeriu-boboc-achitat-de-prima-instanta#ixzz3Iux8RkqO](http://trm.md/en/social/ion-perju-invinuit-de-moartea-lui-valeriu-boboc-achitat-de-prima-instanta#ixzz3Iux8RkqO), December 24, 2013.

<http://trm.md/en/social/ion-perju-invinuit-de-moartea-lui-valeriu-boboc-achitat-de-prima-instanta>

¹⁵ Moldova leader wants poll recount, BBC News, April 10, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7993547.stm>

¹⁶ Moldovan opposition to boycott country's next parliament, April 23, 2009 Deutsche Welle, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4200826,00.html>

¹⁷ Moldova votes out Europe's last ruling Communists, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/30/moldova-votes-communists-out>

people.”¹⁸ His verbal attack on a native minority of Moldova revealed the true agenda of the many forces struggling for the power in Moldova.

As a result of unrest and very mixed results of the elections, the country plunged into political turmoil. Tensions between political parties in their struggle for power in the country, the division of the population along political and ethnic lines, the separation of the country into two parts and the rise of nationalism led to uncertainty and further chaos.

Ever since the brutal crackdown on the April, 2009 rally, and as a result of which over six hundred participants were detained by police arbitrarily and many of whom were beaten during their arrest, have not received any justice. According to the 2012 Amnesty International report, many police officers who were under investigation in regards to the April 2009 events have not been suspended from duty, even after courts issued guilty verdicts. Those who have received punishment have received only suspended sentences.

According to the U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices, On December 29, 2011, Ion Perju, a police officer accused of killing protestor Valeriu Boboc remained free while under investigation for murder.¹⁹

In September 2010, Moldovan authorities attempted to hold a referendum on whether the Moldovan Constitution should be amended to allow Moldovan President to be elected directly by Moldovan population rather than by the Moldovan Parliament. Communists boycotted the referendum and told its supporters not to participate in it.²⁰ The failure of the referendum urged the

¹⁸ Natalia Sineeva-Pankowska and Graeme Atkinson, “Moldova Nationalist rioters storm parliament,” <http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=279>

¹⁹ Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Moldova, 2011, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

²⁰ Moldovan Referendum: Suffers Governing Alliance Crushing Defeat, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=36793&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=27&cHash=fc3480732b](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36793&tx_ttnews[backPid]=27&cHash=fc3480732b)

acting President Mihai Ghimpu to dismiss the Moldovan Parliament and to call new parliamentary elections scheduled for November 28, 2010.²¹

After Marian Lupu was elected by parliamentary fractions of the Democratic Party and the Liberal Party as the speaker of the Moldovan parliament and the acting president of Moldova while communists again refused to vote and to nominate their candidate,²² he agreed to sign a decree appointing Vladimir Filat, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, as the prime minister though earlier he criticized him for having undermined the Alliance for European Integration. However, the political deal urged Mihai Ghimpu, former acting president and chairman of the liberal party, to make accusations, which he promised in January 2011, against Veaceslav Ionita, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Economic Policy, Budget and Finance and a Liberal Democrat, which was considered by other leaders of the Alliance as an attempt to aggravate tension in the Alliance.²³ Such political populism definitely favors the Communist Party, which as a united political force, continues to enjoy the wide support of Moldovan voters. The parliamentary elections in 2010 led to the following results: The Communists won 42 seats, while the Liberal Democrats won 32, the Democratic Party 15, and the Liberals 12. This gave the Alliance for European Integration 59 seats, two short of the 61 needed to elect a President.²⁴ In reality, the Moldovan political scene was divided on two camps: Communists and nationalists.

In the summer of 2011 local elections, Communists received about 46 percent of votes in the Chisinau Municipal Council while gaining 38 percent of all votes in local elections throughout

²¹ Moldavian President Dismisses Parliament, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/content/view/43457/>

²² Marian Lupu Elected as Speaker of Moldovan Parliament and Acting President, Byecomm.com, January 2011, <http://byecomm.com/index.php/Politics/marian-lupu-elected-as-speaker-of-moldovan-parliament-and-acting-president.html>

²³ Mihai Ghimpu aggravates tension in the governing coalition - Liberal Democrats, Moldova azi, July 2011, <http://www.azi.md/en/story/19783>

²⁴ 2010 Moldovan parliamentary election. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Moldovan_parliamentary_election

the country.²⁵ Overall, they continued to be a major political party in Moldova, while the last truly democratic alliance “Our Moldova” ceased to exist in March 2011.²⁶

In December 2011, the Moldovan parliament once again failed to elect president of Moldova as communists continued to boycott the parliament, which precluded Lupu from gaining 61 votes necessary for the election, which may lead to dissolution of the parliament in spring 2012.²⁷ Thus, Moldova, remained without a president for two years, held hostage by the political confrontation between Moldovan Communists and Moldovan so called "democrats."

On March 16, 2012, the Moldovan Parliament elected Nicolae Timofti, who rose up the political ladder as a judge and the head of the Supreme Magistrate Council of Moldova. Moldova had lived without a president for almost three years since President Vladimir Voronin resigned following tragic events of April 2009.²⁸ Despite Voronin’s resignation, Communists continued to dominate the political arena in Moldova and prevented the pro-Western or rather pro-Romanian Alliance for European Integration from electing president by boycotting presidential elections, as a result of which two parliaments have been dissolved, leaving the country in a debilitating political deadlock.²⁹ The election of a new president would seem to have ended the years of political instability and insecurity but, in fact, it has revealed much deeper tensions potentially disastrous for Moldova. Soon after the elections, it turned into reality: on March 25, 2012, Chisinau

²⁵ Всеобщие местные выборы 5 и 11 июня 2011 года (June 5 and June 11, 2011 General Local Elections), Moldova.md, June 2011, <http://www.alegeri.md/ru/>

²⁶ Ион Плешка возглавил Апелляционную палату Кишинева (Ion Aleska headed Appellate Chamber in Chisinau), Vesti.MD, July 2011, <http://vesti.md/?mod=news&id=10067>

²⁷ Выборы президента Молдовы провалились, (Presidential Elections in Moldova failed), ROSBALT, Decemebr 2011, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/exussr/2011/12/16/925399.html>

²⁸ Президентом Молдавии избран 63-летний судья Николае Тимофти (63 Years Old Judge Nicolae Timofti Elected President of Moldova), Reuters, March 2012, <http://ru.reuters.com/article/topNews/idRURXE82F0I420120316?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

²⁹ Президентом Молдавии избран 63-летний судья Николае Тимофти (63 Years Old Judge Nicolae Timofti Elected President of Moldova), Reuters, March 2012, <http://ru.reuters.com/article/topNews/idRURXE82F0I420120316?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

witnessed clashes between the communists and socialists on one side and the unionists or those who support the unification of Moldova and Romania on the other.³⁰

Moldovan opposition, including Communists, criticized the elections as illegitimate claiming that the parliament had had to be dissolved because it had not been able to elect president for twelve months after failing to hold elections in December 2011 and calling the election of the president a “farce.” Following the elections, Communists managed to gather about seventy thousands of protestors in the center of Chisinau chanting “Moldova. Revolution! Down with Alliance!” Vladimir Voronin, former president and leader of the Party of Communists, called his supporters to stop the protests and gather on May 1, 2012, to hold the Civil Congress, which Communists were planning to run as government alternative to the government run by the Alliance for European Integration.³¹

An outside observer would describe the political situation in Moldova as a triumph of democracy and democratic principles but in fact the 2012 presidential elections were nothing but a result of feud wars of Moldovan clans who use political parties as instruments to secure their interests.

President Nicolae Timofti was elected only after three members of the Communist party headed by Igor Dodon formed their own socialist block in the Parliament and expressed their support for Nicolae Timofti.³² However, the Parliament passed the censure to dissolve the Cabinet of Ministers by 54 votes in favor of the motion. The Info-Prim news agency reported that Prime

³⁰ Tateana Poleasova. Столкновения в ходе "Марша объединения". Члены организации "Патриоты Молдовы" попытались остановить манифестантов (Clashes During the “March of Unification.” Members of the Organization “Patriots of Moldova” Attempted to Stop the Demonstrators). Republica.Md, March 25, 2012. http://ru.publika.md/link_461971.html

³¹ Президентом Молдавии избран 63-летний судья Николае Тимофти (63 Years Old Judge Nicolae Timofti Elected President of Moldova), Reuters, March 2012, <http://ru.reuters.com/article/topNews/idRURXE82F0I420120316?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

³² Президентом Молдавии избран 63-летний судья Николае Тимофти (63 Years Old Judge Nicolae Timofti Elected President of Moldova), Reuters, March 2012, <http://ru.reuters.com/article/topNews/idRURXE82F0I420120316?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

Minister Vlad Filat must submit the Cabinet's resignation to the President within three days.³³ On March 8, 2013, President Nicolae Timofti signed the government resignation decree.³⁴

Following the 2014 parliamentary elections, Moldova has become even more politically divided with socialists and communists gaining more power. Whereas, so-called pro-European forces have failed to remain united. Having made a behind-the-curtains agreement with the Party of Communists, the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (LDPM) led by Vlad Filat formed a minority coalition excluding the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM). The newly formed coalition also boycotted the nomination for prime minister of Iurie Leanca, who is viewed as one of the few politicians in Moldova capable of advancing reforms in the country. According to Kamil Călus at the Center for Eastern Studies, an independent research institution based in Warsaw, Moldova has been living through the “process of subordinating state institutions to the leaders of the parties.”³⁵

On January 28, 2015, Prime Minister Iurie Leancă was assigned a task to form the government. However, despite the support from the democrats, on February 12, the parliament refused to approve of the new government as the Communists and both so-called liberal parties voted against the nominations. Soon after, on February 18, the Moldovan parliament appointed the new government by votes cast by the Political Alliance for European Moldova and the Communists. As a result, the parliament appointed Chiril Gaburici, a businessman, who has no political background or political experience and who “has ties to both former prime minister Vlad

³³ Government dismissed, IPN, March 5, 2013, <http://www.allmoldova.com/en/moldova-news/1249055728.html>

³⁴ Moldovan president approves government's resignation, Moldova Press, March 8, 2013,

³⁵ A captured state? Moldova's Uncertain Prospects for Modernization, Center for Eastern Studies, April 2015, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2015-04-22/appropriated-state-moldovas-uncertain-prospects-modernisation>

Filat and Oleg Voronin, son of Vladimir Voronin – the Communists’ leader and former president.”³⁶

On June 12, 2015, the new government resigned. On June 16, Prime Minister Chiril Gaburici resigned as well following “a probe into the authenticity of his high school diploma and university degree.”³⁷

The situation in the country dramatically deteriorated since March 2015, when mass continuous antigovernment protests followed a corruption scandal emerged after the disappearance of one billion euro from the banking system in 2014. On September 6, 2015 Chisinau witnessed a huge protest which brought between 35,000-40,000 to 100,000 to Great Assembly Square.³⁸ Thus, during another protest on January 21, 2016 protesters gathered on the central square of Chisinau, clashed with police and broke into the Parliament building demanding the resignation of the government and early elections. The Prosecutor General’s Office immediately opened cases against some protesters.³⁹ As Maia Sandu, a former education minister of Moldova put it, “the situation could lead to violence.”⁴⁰

In April 2016, a new wave of antigovernment protests broke out. On April 24, 2016, a few thousands protesters gathered in front of the Parliament Building demanding the resignation of the

³⁶ A captured state? Moldova’s Uncertain Prospects for Modernization, Center for Eastern Studies, April 2015, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2015-04-22/appropriated-state-moldovas-uncertain-prospects-modernisation>

³⁷ Moldova: 3 Pro-European Parties Agree on New Government Coalition, New York Times, July 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/07/22/world/europe/ap-eu-moldova-politics.html?_r=0

³⁸ Moldova protesters take to streets criticising 'mafia' government. The Guardian, September 6, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/06/moldova-protesters-take-to-streets-criticising-mafia-government>

³⁹ Moldova political crisis: Protesters break into parliament. BBC news agency. January 21, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35366194>

⁴⁰ A Republic, if You Can Steal It. The Economist. January 30th – February 5th, 2016.p.44.

cabinet and President Timofti and holding early parliamentary and presidential elections. To disperse the protest, the police used tear gas and detained the most active participants.⁴¹

On August 27, 2016, the Independence Day of Moldova, few thousand protesters held an antigovernment rally on Central Square in Chisinau chanting “Down with Mafia.” The police used tear gas to disperse them.⁴²

Any attempts to turn the country toward Europe and establish working ties with the European Union failed due to the profound corruption of the mid-level Moldovan bureaucracy staffed mainly by Communists, their supporters and nationalists, for whom the European connections would mean the end of their careers.

RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN MOLDOVA

Russian interest in Moldova never dissipated since the break of the Soviet Union, and controlling Transnistria did not diminish the Russian interference in Moldovan affairs. President Vladimir Putin developed the policy of keeping the post-Soviet countries in the Russian orbit, which negatively impacted progressive developments in the former Soviet Union.

On November 13, 2016, the country held the second round of presidential elections, where Igor Dodon, the pro-Russian leader of the Party of Socialists of Moldova, gained the majority of votes. During his presidential campaign, he openly sympathized with the authoritarian ruling style of Russia’s President Vladimir Putin, saying that “Moldova immediately needs an iron fist, a

⁴¹ Протесты в Кишиневе: Молдавской властью недовольны все. (Protests in Chisinau: Everyone is Dissatisfied with the Moldovan Authorities). Vesti.ru News Agency. April 24, 2016. <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2746713>

⁴² Молдова отметила День Независимости протестами (Moldova Celebrated the Independence Day with Protests). Korrespondent.Net News Agency. August 27, 2016. <http://korrespondent.net/world/3737206-moldova-otmetyla-den-nezavysymosti-protestaymy>

strong government’s power” and that he was going to be “a dictatorial leader, the same as Putin.”⁴³ His words illustrated the major tendency in Moldovan politics: the further sliding toward an authoritarian regime.

President Dodon is embroiled in another row, this time with the Moldovan parliament, which wants him to sign a law banning Russian news broadcasts and so-called ‘propaganda,’ which was initiated by Vladimir Plohotniuc and his Democratic Party. Igor Dodon – who openly favors closer ties with Russia – has already vetoed the bill once, sending it back to parliament after claiming it was against the principles of free speech.⁴⁴

The battle for Moldova’s orientation toward the West or toward Russia became the core of the country’s political life. The Democrats claimed to be the only pro-EU party that can stop the Socialists taking Moldova back into the embrace of Moscow, its master during the Soviet period.⁴⁵ The Democratic Party led by Vladimir Plahotniuc confronted the Russian regime, when in 2017 its government’s Foreign Ministry declared Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin *persona non grata* - a further deterioration in bilateral relations after tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats. In May 2017 Moldova, in solidarity with the European Union and the United States expelled five Russian diplomats.⁴⁶ Of course, Russia could not tolerate such behavior from a former Soviet state and Vladimir Plahotniuc became its primary target.

In June 2019, Moldova lived through some sort of *coup d'etat*, when the government of Vladimir Plahotniuc and his Democratic Party of Moldova was ousted. The pro-EU ACUM

⁴³ Igor Dodon is Vladimir Putin’s Moldovan Mini-Me. The Daily Beast News Agency. October 29, 2016. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/10/29/igor-dodon-is-vladimir-putin-s-moldovan-mini-me.html>

⁴⁴ New Political Crisis Hits Moldova. Emerging Europe News Agency. December 29, 2017. <http://emerging-europe.com/in-brief/new-political-crisis-hits-moldova/>

⁴⁵ Daniel McLaughlin. Moldovan opposition leaders ‘poisoned’ ahead of key elections. The Irish Times, February 22, 2019. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/moldovan-opposition-leaders-poisoned-ahead-of-keyelections-1.3803068>

⁴⁶ Moldova declares Russian deputy PM Rogozin *persona non grata*. Reuters, August 2, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-moldova-rogozin/moldova-declares-russian-deputy-pm-rogozin-persona-nongrata-idUSKBN1A11MZ>

alliance and Kremlin-friendly Socialists unexpectedly formed a coalition government. However, Moldova's constitutional court ruled that the new government was formed illegally after a 90-day post-election deadline had passed, and it also briefly suspended Moldovan president Igor Dodon to allow the Democrats to dissolve the parliament and call snap elections for September.⁴⁷ Still, the ACUM and Socialists usurped power and Vladimir Plahotniuc fled the country.

In reality, the Kremlin was a major player who changed the distribution of power in Moldova. Moscow decided to get rid of Plahotniuc and, practically, ordered Dodon to form an alliance with the ACUM despite the diametrically opposed political positions. Being the strongest foreign power which influences Moldovan politics, Putin's regime succeeded.⁴⁸ At that time, it was unclear why Moscow allowed, and even pressed Igor Dodon to become allied with the ACUM.

Igor Dodon has been turning Moldova toward Russia, and developing anti-Western politics. Dodon said, "Pro-Western political forces attempt to block my presidential initiatives aimed at restoration of good strategic economic relationships with Russia." Plahotniuc's Democratic Party of Moldova said the new administration had tried to usurp power at Russia's behest.⁴⁹ In fact, the ruling neo-Communist party began to use the state apparatus against the political rivals. In particular, it forced the Procurator General's Office to pursue the DPM.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Daniel McLaughlin. Moldova's new government calls mass rally to oust rival cabinet. The Irish Times, June 13, 2019. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/moldova-s-new-government-calls-mass-rally-to-oust-rival-cabinet-1.3924977>

⁴⁸ Vladimir Socor. Russian Minister Kozak's Mission in Moldova Unveils Kremlin Vision of Forced Non-Alignment for Europe's East. The Jamestown Foundation: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 16 Issue: 95, June 27, 2019. <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-minister-kozaks-mission-in-moldova-unveils-kremlin-vision-of-forced-non-alignment-for-europes-east/>; PSRM deputies confirmed Kozak is involved in creating an alliance between ACUM and socialist party. Publica, June 13, 2019. https://en.publika.md/psrm-deputies-confirmed-kozak-is-involved-in-creating-an-alliance-between-acum-and-socialist-party_2658708.html

⁴⁹ Alexander Tanas. Moldovan president suspended, snap election called as crisis deepens. Reuters, June 9, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-moldova-politics/moldovan-president-suspended-snap-election-called-as-crisis-deepens-idUSKCN1TA06Q>

⁵⁰ Cristina Gurez. Partidul Democrat Din Moldova Condamna Noul Atac Asupra Sa Din Partea Guvernarii Psmr-Acum, Prin Utilizarea Procuraturii Generale [The Democratic Party of Moldova Condemned the New Attack by the



President Igor Dodon and Russian President Vladimir Putin

The leader of the nation also added that the goal of the “overseas curators” is to cause a quarrel between Moldova and Russia by any means.⁵¹

Moldova quickly went under the sphere of Russian influence after the beginning of Dodon’s presidency.⁵² It became the country the most susceptible to Russian propaganda.⁵³

“There is a division of the Russian news agency, Sputnik, in Moldova that shows how much Russia is helping us and how much negativity we get from the European Union or West,” Petru Macovei, executive director of the Independent Press Association of Moldova, pointed out. According to a study titled “Resistance to Disinformation in Central and Eastern Europe,” 10 out of the top 15 television channels that are most watched are mostly Russian language broadcasts and programs. The Vcourse.md website, is seen to often promote the Party of Socialists and

Governing PSRM-Acum by Using the Procurator General’s Office. Tribuna, August 5, 2019. <https://tribuna.md/2019/08/05/partidul-democrat-din-moldova-condamna-noul-atac-asupra-sa-din-partea-guvernarii-psrm-acum-prin-utilizarea-procuraturii-generale/>

⁵¹ Moldova Sank into Political Crisis or the Fight for Political Ranking Entered the Critical Phase? Komsomolskaia Pravda News Agency. August 31, 2018. <https://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26725.4/3751004/>

⁵² Darina Regio with Andrea Snyder. Russia's Influence Grows After Moldovan Elections. ISW, March 6, 2019. <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russias-influence-grows-after-moldovan-elections>

⁵³ Moldova ‘Most Exposed’ to Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe. Polygraph.info, August 3, 2018. <https://www.polygraph.info/a/moldova-most-exposed-russian-propaganda/29410554.html>

Moldovan President Igor Dodon. Local experts on disinformation accuse the agency of producing misleading and fake news favorable to Russia.

On August 2, 2018, Sputnik’s Russian-language Web site for Moldova carried stories critical of NATO, the United Nations and the EU, as well as a Russian government narrative relating to the murder of three Russian journalists investigating a government-linked private military company operating in the Central African Republic.⁵⁴

In addition, the Metropolis of Chişinău of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the country’s most trusted institution, is still considered to be oriented toward Russia⁵⁵ which boosts the Russian position and influence in the country.



Moldova, 2018 - May 1st Socialist demonstration, a march in Chişinău on the traditional Soviet Day of Labor. <https://www.polygraph.info/a/moldova-most-exposed-russian-propaganda/29410554.html>

The Russian influence penetrated all major institutions in Moldova, including the SIS (Information and Security Service) and military. After the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM),

⁵⁴ Moldova ‘Most Exposed’ to Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe. Polygraph.info, August 3, 2018. <https://www.polygraph.info/a/moldova-most-exposed-russian-propaganda/29410554.html>

⁵⁵ Moldova ‘Most Exposed’ to Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe. Polygraph.info, August 3, 2018. <https://www.polygraph.info/a/moldova-most-exposed-russian-propaganda/29410554.html>

run by businessman Vladimir Plahotniuc, was ousted from power, Igor Dodon, backed by his loyal socialists, began to obey rules from the Kremlin even more. Apart from the defense ministry, socialists are now in charge of the department responsible for negotiations with Transnistria and the Information and Security Service (SIS), Moldova's only special service. New legislation on intelligence services has de facto given full authority over the SIS to the pro-Russian political camp in Chisinau. The president will be able to "coordinate the activities of the SIS" while the new law will also empower him to nominate candidates for the service's deputy head.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu's trip to Moldova in August, 2019 showed that Moscow has already begun to politically consume recent changes in Chisinau that the West had seemed to warmly welcome. Dodon's inner circle is full of presidential aides that had earlier served in Soviet services and no wonder that they all suggest that Moldova forge an alliance with Moscow. Still in Chisinau, Shoigu made a proposal to form a three-year partnership plan between the countries' defense ministries. And this should not be a problem since Moldova's defense ministry is in the hands of the socialists.⁵⁶

The ruling parties began to consolidate power in order to suppress the opposition. Pavel Filip, one of the Democratic Party leaders, accused ACUM of backtracking on its electoral promise and of striking a secret deal with the Socialists to share key law enforcement offices between each other. "The Prosecutor General's Office is now an instrument in the hands of the current government and it's obvious for everybody that the latest criminal cases have been opened on the orders of those in power," declared the Democratic leader.⁵⁷ However, November 12, 2019

⁵⁶ Shoigu's Mission: Russia Holds Moldova Firmly In Its Grip. The Warsaw Institute, August 28, 2019. <https://warsawinstitute.org/shoigus-mission-russia-holds-moldova-firmly-grip/>

⁵⁷ Parliament Democrats say ready to support European chief prosecutor. IPN, October 4, 2019. https://www.ipn.md/en/parliament-democrats-say-ready-to-support-european-chief-prosecutor-7965_1068598.html#ixzz66ATDQKj

showed who was a leader in this game: the government of Maia Sandu was dismissed and Igor Dodon and his neo-Communists completely took power in Moldova.⁵⁸

The endless instability of the Moldovan government causes more turmoil and, accordingly, more lawlessness and injustice. Historical, cultural, religious and ideological ties contributed to Moldovan connections to Russia, which are getting stronger.

TORTURE IN MOLDOVA

In order to preserve power and to control the country, the Communist government continued Soviet style practices of political repression, which includes arbitrary detentions, arrests, harassment, intimidation, torture and use of excessive force. Torture continues to be a serious problem even after the Alliance for European Integration gained the majority of seats in Moldovan Parliament in July 2009. Police and the secret police, called the Security and Information Service (or SIS), torture those who fall into their hands, in other words, either arrested by them or referred to them by police. Amnesty International reports: “Moldova is failing to fulfill its obligations under international human rights law to ensure the individual’s right to freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. In this report, Amnesty International shows that despite measures taken by the Moldovan government to bring legislation into line with international and European standards, torture and ill-treatment in police custody remain

⁵⁸ Maia Sandu: Igor Dodon wants a Government to control, to use for electoral purposes. IPN, November 14, 2009. https://www.ipn.md/en/maia-sandu-igor-dodon-wants-a-government-to-control-to-7965_1069585.html#ixzz66AbuYfQf

widespread and people who are ill-treated and tortured while detained by the police, do not have adequate protection or recourse to justice.”⁵⁹

The Moldovan police demonstrated unprecedented violence when they quashed the April 2009 opposition protest. Many participants were detained and subjected to torture and physical abuse. The detainees later claimed that at least three of the detained participants had died while in police custody and as a result of the torture and abuse they received while in detention.⁶⁰

Despite the political changes that took place in Moldova following the April 2009 protests, “torture and other ill-treatment in police custody remains routine in Moldova,”⁶¹ which is supported by the findings of the October, 2011 Amnesty International research:

“Hundreds of people were detained by police, including many peaceful protestors. Many of them alleged that they had been subjected to beatings and other forms of ill-treatment. There were reports of beatings using police batons and other objects; in one case a metal shoe-horn was used. Some reported that groups of detainees were made to walk down “corridors” of police officers who beat, punched and kicked them as they passed.”⁶²

At the same time, law enforcement officers who perpetrate these acts of torture oftentimes enjoy impunity as “the state is failing to carry out prompt, thorough and independent

⁵⁹ Moldova: Police torture and ill-treatment: “It’s just normal.” Amnesty International, October 23, 2007. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR59/002/2007> [Need more recent source – post 2009]

⁶⁰ Moldova police face brutality allegations <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8007428.stm>

⁶¹ <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR59/001/2011/en/d6d885ae-5e0b-4b19-8ea8-6360d2937bfb/eur590012011en.pdf>

⁶² Moldova: Annual Report 2011, Amnesty International, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR59/001/2011/en/d6d885ae-5e0b-4b19-8ea8-6360d2937bfb/eur590012011en.pdf>

investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.”⁶³ The 2011 U.S. Department of State Human Rights Report reiterates these findings on torture practices in Moldova:

“Torture was rarely meaningfully punished. Anti-torture prosecutors received 200 complaints of torture during the year and initiated 28 criminal investigations. Of the 11 cases against police officers that resulted in judgments, two police officers received prison sentences that were later overturned, two received suspended sentences, and seven were acquitted.”⁶⁴

In view of the widespread torture practices and impunity of law enforcement, officers’ arbitrary detentions of protesters in Moldova remains a serious concern. According to the 2011 U.S. Department of State Human Rights Report, Moldovan law enforcement engaged in arbitrary detentions and arrests:

A parliamentary ombudsman employed by the government regularly visited detention sites, including police stations and detention rooms at psychiatric hospitals. The ombudsman found that many of those arrested were not registered in logbooks. Most of the individuals detained at police stations were arrested for petty crimes, insulting police, or for document checks, despite carrying valid documents.⁶⁵

The situation did not change much in 2016. The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016 reveals:

⁶³ Moldova: Annual Report 2011, Amnesty International, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR59/001/2011/en/d6d885ae-5e0b-4b19-8ea8-6360d2937bfb/eur590012011en.pdf>

⁶⁴ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Moldova, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> (last accessed on April 13, 2013)

⁶⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011: Moldova, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> (last accessed on April 13, 2013)

Significant problems [in Moldova] included: allegations of torture and mistreatment by police, prison guards, and staff at psycho-neurological institutions. Despite a decrease in alleged torture cases, human rights experts noted that the number of cases was higher than reported due to individuals not reporting cases of torture because of a lack of trust in the justice sector. The high number of acquittals in torture cases highlighted deficiencies in the law and case proceedings. Authorities continued to downgrade some incidents of alleged police torture to lesser offenses, such as abuse of power, for which the penalties are lower and the statute of limitations is only three months. This practice allowed judges to issue suspended sentences based on the “good character” of the offending officers or to dismiss cases if the statute of limitations expired.⁶⁶

The goal of torture is to get confessions and intimidation, and the results of these cruel practices are fear, anger, distrust of the authorities, and discrediting of the whole judicial system.⁶⁷

According to published statistics, the respondents most frequently stated that they had been tortured or subjected to other forms of cruel treatment with the goal of punishing them for committed or alleged wrongdoings, of illegally acquiring evidence, information, or testimonies, of demonstrating power over the victims and neglect of the rules of conduct, as well as of intimidating and discriminating against them.⁶⁸ Instead of decreasing, the number of complaints

⁶⁶U.S. State Department Report on Country Conditions in Moldova in 2016.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

⁶⁷ Tortures in the Republic of Moldova: Goals and Consequences. Point News Agency. June 27, 2017.
<https://point.md/ru/novosti/politika/pytki-v-respublike-moldova-tsel-i-posledstviia>

⁶⁸ Tortures are Still Present in Moldova. Point News Agency. February 22, 2018.
<https://point.md/ru/novosti/obschestvo/iavlenie-pytok-po-prezhnemu-prisutstvuet-v-moldove>

regarding torture increased in 2017 in comparison with 2016.⁶⁹ The impunity of law enforcement agencies serves as a fertile soil for using torture.

In sum, the situation regarding torture in Moldova has seen little improvement for the last years. The superficial changes in Moldovan parliament had virtually no effect on the human rights situation in Moldova, in general, as the parliament is dysfunctional and crippled by the standoff between so-called democratic forces and socialists and communists.

CORRUPTION IN MOLDOVA

Corruption in Moldova is rampant. It has deeply penetrated all spheres of Moldovan society. The recent political changes, namely political fragmentation due to the shift of power from the communists to the Alliance for European Integration, which has led to the emergence of new economic and political clans, have considerably deepened the corruption crisis.

The Barometer of Public Opinion survey, conducted by the "CBS-AXA" Center for Sociological Studies and Marketing in the fall of 2011, revealed much more disturbing sentiments, which are consistent with the 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index, among the Moldovan population. 83.5 percent of the respondents stated that the country is heading in the wrong direction, which indicates the high level of distrust towards the government whereas 88 percent of respondents were discontent with the government policies to tackle corruption.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ В Молдове участились пытки, в прошлом году было рассмотрено 639 жалобы [The Number of Torture Cases Grew Up in Moldova: There Were Reviewed 639 Complaints]. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, November 20, 2018. <https://www.kp.md/daily/26910/3956027/>

⁷⁰ 83,5% населения Молдовы считает, что страна движется в неверном направлении (83.5 Percent of Moldovan Population Believes that the Country is Heading in a Wrong Direction), Interlic, November 2011, <http://ru.interlic.md/2011-11-16/835-naselenija-moldovy-schitaet-chto-strana-dvizhetsja-v-nevernom-napravlenii-22937.html>

Commenting on police corruption, Alexandru Procop, Vice Chairman of the Adjuta Cives, stated, that "Police officers are ready to dismiss any case for money, to destroy evidence or even fail to investigate certain cases."⁷¹

Since April 2015, the Moldovan capital Chisinau has continuously faced mass protests against the corrupt government. Protesters demand the investigation of the disappearance of one billion Euros, which constituted about one eighth of the country's GDP, from three national banks and the resignation of the government and other high-ranking officials. In September 2015, the most sizable protests took place in Moldova. According to different estimates, from 50,000 to 100,000 people took to the Central Square of Chisinau demanding the resignation of the government and early elections. On October 15, 2015 the parliament voted for deprivation of deputy immunity of former Prime Minister Vlad Filat and subsequently he was detained for 30 days in relation to bank fraud. In 2016, former prime minister Vlad Filat was sentenced to nine years in prison in connection with a scandal of one billion dollars stolen from the banks, but there have been few other high-level prosecutions.⁷²

A new political and economical order, which is much more corrupt than under the present communist rule, has emerged in an already fragmented Moldova, where the communists continue to retain influence while democratic parties represent only political and economical clans. Such conditions considerably increase the risk of human rights violations, while pervasive corruption weakens both law enforcement agencies and the judicial system, which are responsible for protecting human rights. These conditions contribute to a culture of impunity, since unlawful

⁷¹ Комиссариаты полиции работают на Филата (Police Commissariats Work for Filat), AVA.MD, June 2011, <http://ava.md/societdy/011601-korruptsiya-v-pravoohranitel-noi-sisteme-moldovi.html>

⁷² Moldova. Freedom in the World 2019. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/moldova>

government actions are not punished and the laws of Moldova are not upheld consistently and fairly for all people.⁷³

Those people, whistleblowers, who dare report and expose corruption are not protected in Moldova.⁷⁴ Whistleblower disclosures and retaliation complaints, however, are not systematically tracked, and retaliation cases against civil servants who report corruption are not monitored. Whistleblowing generally is negatively perceived and not commonly practiced in Moldova, and there have been cases of reprisals against people who reported wrongdoing. The term “whistleblowing” is not well known and is confused with “witness.” This can deter people from coming forward out of concern they will become involved with court proceedings. According to Transparency International Moldova, the information submitted by some whistleblowers to public authorities has been forwarded to the very public official who was accused of wrongdoing. Some of its clients have declined to appear as witnesses in corruption cases, and some have given Transparency International Moldova false names and addresses out of fear of reprisals. Anonymous reports typically are not investigated thoroughly by the authorities.⁷⁵

The case of Mihail Gofman is illustrative. He became one of the most prominent whistleblowers in Moldova in 2014, who gave out information he claimed linked top Moldovan political leaders and possibly U.S. citizens to a \$1 billion heist that gutted the Moldovan banking system. As a result, he feared he was being followed, and fled his native Moldova in a borrowed car, drove to neighboring Romania and flew to Washington. Gofman used to be deputy chief of a

⁷³ Human Rights and anti-corruption, United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Development/GoodGovernance/Pages/AntiCorruption.aspx> last accessed on April 13, 2013

⁷⁴ Kaunain Rahman. Moldova: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption with a focus on the healthcare and procurement sectors. Transparency International, 2017. <https://www.u4.no/publications/moldova-overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption>

⁷⁵ Moldova. In Protecting Whistleblowers In Southeast Europe A Review Of Policies, Cases And Initiatives. Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection, 2017, pp. 36 and 39. <http://rai-see.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Protecting-Whistleblowers-in-SE-Europe.pdf>

government anti-money laundering unit in Moldova. He says he was forced out after speaking about people he said were linked to the theft. Gofman decided to leave Moldova after German diplomats advised him to do so in July, 2014. "They even told me to photograph what was in my bags so nobody could put something in them, like drugs." Gofman said. He said U.S. investigators advised him not to return to Moldova.⁷⁶

Moldova is the 120th least corrupt nation out of 180 countries, according to the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by Transparency International.⁷⁷ In other words, corruption is endemic in Moldova, and those who attempt to struggle against it fall victim to government actors.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND MASS MEDIA

There is a significant lack of freedom of speech, as well as strict censorship of mass media publications and broadcasts, especially those that are sponsored by the state. Thus, freedom of speech remains a significant problem in Moldova. After Vladimir Voronin took over the president's office, the situation became worse and has not improved after the elections of 2009.

Restrictions on press include forbidding the press from "disputing or defaming the State and the people," while political parties that "militate" against the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, remain in the Constitution. The media is gagged and bound by laws that include public figures being allowed to sue for defamation, without distinction between their private and public persona. This leads journalists to practice self-censorship. In

⁷⁶ Moldovan flees to US to share details of \$1 billion theft. The Rising Nepal, November 15, 2014. <https://therisingnepal.org.np/news/15527>

⁷⁷ Moldova. Transparency International. <https://tradingeconomics.com/moldova/corruption-rank>

cases where suits have been filed against journalists and media organs, the defendants almost always lose.⁷⁸

In August 2013, in Chisinau, police detained a journalist named Dmitriy Salamatin and confiscated the video materials when he attempted to record the questioning of a traffic incident victim. Police failed to explain on which grounds the journalist was not allowed to make video recordings.⁷⁹

Reporters often experience political pressure from the government, such as denial of access to information and events, or public denunciations by government officials. This contributes to self-censorship and the suppression of critical news coverage.⁸⁰

In April 2014, the Moldovan Coordination Council for Television and Radio Broadcasts banned TV Channel Rossiya 24 due to the “biased representation” of information and analytical programs on the TV channel in regard to events in Moldova.⁸¹

The media in Moldova are far from being independent. A range of studies clearly showed that media owned by politicians are not only biased, but also heavily manipulate information and in some cases even employ propaganda techniques in order to promote the owners’ interests. Petru Macovei, the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Press, states this manipulation across all sections of the media (broadcast, print and radio) speaks to a lack of professional integrity of some Moldovan journalists, who deliberately choose to serve vested political interests. “I feel that now, six years after the Communists were discarded from power, the number of truly

⁷⁸Post-Soviet Media Law & Policy Newsletter, Issue 56, July 1999, available at <http://www.rferl.org/bd/ro/info/mo-hr.html>

⁷⁹В Кишиневе полиция задержала журналиста за съемку действий полицейских (In Chisinau, Police Detained a Journalist for Video Recording of Police Actions), Omega, August 2013, <http://omg.md/ru/111423/>

⁸⁰ Moldova. Freedom in the World 2018. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/moldova>

⁸¹ Moldova’s coordination council for TV, radio bans Rossiya 24 broadcasts. The Kyiv Post, June 4, 2014. <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/war-against-ukraine/moldovas-coordination-council-for-tv-radio-bans-rossiya-24-broadcasts-354685.html>

independent media outlets — not subordinated to political or economic groups of interest — has decreased,” concludes Macovei.

The public reacted accordingly to the rise of official and self-censorship. Most Russian-speaking Moldovans are traditionally pro-Russian in their political sympathies. The country’s Russian-speakers also watch Russian-language content produced in Russia, which dominates the Moldovan media market. According to the Barometer of Public Opinion in April 2015, about 40% of the population get its information from media from Russia, 73% — from Moldovan media, and 10% — from Romania and the EU. The trust of people in Russian media was pretty high — 47%, compared to the Moldovan media - 55%. Overall, as Nadine Gogu points out: In sum, the future for freedom of expression and independent media in Moldova does not look too bright.⁸²

June of 2019 is an exemplary month to illustrate the state of media in Moldova. The Index on Censorship reports:

In the last month, the number of cases of assaults against journalists in the Republic of Moldova has been staggering and follows a troubling trend of harassment in recent years. Media and free expression NGOs around the globe condemn the assaults, intimidations and violent actions taken against at least 16 journalists during the protests and surrounding the events of June 7-9, 2019 organized at Chisinau by the Democratic Party of Moldova. Over the three-day period, several media outlets published video materials broadcasting assaults against their reporters while they were in the field to document the events and inform citizens.

In one example, TV 8 reporter, Sergiu Niculita, and a cameraman were assaulted, their camera obstructed, and their microphone struck; a protester also extinguished a cigarette

⁸² Nadine Gogu. Who really rules the airwaves in Moldova? Open Democracy, March 22, 2016. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/who-really-rules-airwaves-in-moldova/>

on the microphone sponge and damaged it.

Another reporter from UNIMEDIA was assaulted and intimidated by the bodyguard of top democratic leaders, and members of the State Protection and Guarding Service when she attempted to ask the leaders of the Democratic Party questions. These are two examples of several attacks that took place during the aforementioned timeframe. Following these incidents, both Reporters without Borders and the OSCE Media Freedom Representative issued condemnations and called for action.

These intimidation tactics are part of a broader trend of harassment towards journalists over the last two years. As noted in the Independent Journalist Center (IJC)'s 2018, Moldovan Press Status Index, verbal assaults and threats against journalists continue to increase around the country, often met with a weak response, or complete lack thereof, from law enforcement bodies.⁸³

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the true lack of freedom of information in Moldova. By the provision of the Audiovisual Council of the Republic of Moldova, media outlets are obliged to present only the official position of the competent public authorities. Besides that, journalists are not allowed to express their opinion on COVID-19 health issues.⁸⁴

⁸³ Moldovan authorities need to act as the safety of journalists is threatened. The Index on Censorship, July 3, 2019. <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2019/07/moldovan-authorities-need-to-act-as-the-safety-of-journalists-is-threatened/>

⁸⁴ Moldova: Media Censorship during State of Emergency. Balkanmedia, March 20, 2020. <https://www.kas.de/en/web/balkanmedia/media-news/detail/-/content/moldova-media-censorship-during-state-of-emergency>



Moldovan journalists rallying against censorship in the capital, Chisinau, May 8, 2020. Photo: EPA/Doru Dumitru. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/23/moldova-authorities-accused-of-lacking-transparency-about-pandemic/>

The examples of abuse are numerous and span across the board regarding media censorship in every aspect of Moldovan life, social structure, politics, and government abuses. The situation of censorship and mass media persecution in Moldova remains unacceptable and makes the country a dangerous place for honest and critical journalists.

UNRECOGNIZED PRIDNESTROVIAN MOLDAVIAN REPUBLIC (TRANSNISTRIA)

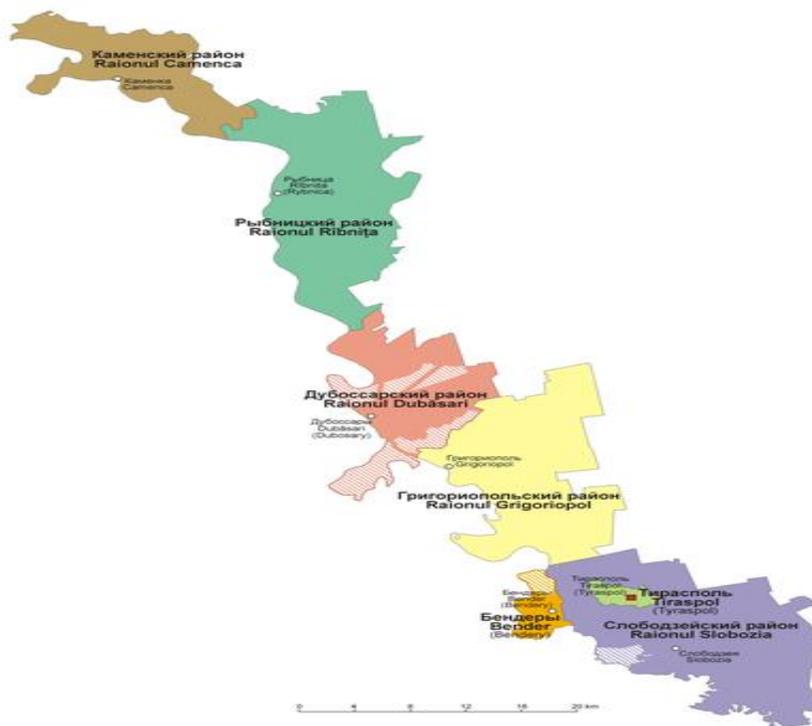
Transnistria, a breakaway region of Moldova, hosts an authoritarian self-perpetuating regime of Igor Smirnov, a former Soviet Union functionary,⁸⁵ who has been a president for over two decades.⁸⁶ Transnistria is not recognized by any state, including neighboring Moldova and Ukraine. It received recognition only from other unrecognized separatist governments of South

⁸⁵ Permanent President. *Kommersant*, December 2006, http://www.kommersant.com/p729128/r_527/Permanent_President/

⁸⁶ President of Pridnesrovian Moldavian Republic Official Website, <http://www.presidentpmr.org/english>

Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁸⁷ In other words, Transnistria is a part of Moldova until its status is resolved within the framework of international law. The unrecognized status of Transnistria allowed its political elite to turn the region into a “grey zone,” a transit route for human trafficking, arms and drugs smuggling, with an extremely poor human rights record due to the lack of international oversight and inapplicability of international norms.

MAP OF TRANSNISTRIA



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Naddniestrze-administracja.png>

Transnistrian authorities are notorious for use of torture and brutal suppression of human rights and freedoms including right to elect government and freedom of assembly. Political

⁸⁷ Nation-States, CSOs, and Second-Track Diplomacy, International Journal on World Peace, June 2011, <http://www.ijwp.org/2011/06/nation-states-csos-and-second-track-diplomacy/>

dissidents perceived by Transnistrian authorities as threat are often charged with a “treason and espionage in favor of the Republic of Moldova.” For example, Ilie Cazac, an employee of Bender Tax Service, and Ernst Vardanyan, a journalist, were charged with espionage and sentenced to lengthy terms in prison.⁸⁸

According to Ilie Cazac’s mother she was denied visiting rights and was kept in the dark about her son’s detention conditions. International human rights organizations claim that Ilie Cazac’s life and safety were in danger and demanded that Transnistrian authorities allow him to be examined by a physician and transferred to a hospital.⁸⁹

In March 2007, Transnistrian authorities subjected several political opponents, including Stefan Uritu, leader of Moldovan Human Rights Helsinki Committee, to arbitrary detention criticizing Igor Smirnov’s regime.⁹⁰ In July 2011, in Tiraspol, first in the short history of this unrecognized state where prior attempts to hold rallies were stopped before they started, public protests took place but the rally organized by the Proryv National Democratic Party, an opposition political movement, was quickly dispersed by police.⁹¹

In December 2011, presidential elections took place in Transnistria, the results of which were a surprise to the international community and to the leaderships of neighboring Ukraine and Moldova as well as Russia. Igor Smirnov, the long standing president of unrecognized breakaway Transnistria and notorious communist style dictator, failed to get to the second round of the elections as he tried to run for a fifth presidential term. President Smirnov’s move outraged

⁸⁸ Ilie Cazac writes second pardon letter to Smirnov, Allmoldova, August 2011, <http://www.allmoldova.com/en/moldova-news/1249051147.html>

⁸⁹ Безопасность Илие Казака под угрозой, (Safety of Ilie Cazac is in Danger), Panorama, March 2011, <http://pan.md/news/Bezopasnosti-Ilie-Kazaka-pod-ugrozoy>

⁹⁰ Transnistrian power wielding forces hold over ten opponents of breakaway regime, Moldova.org, march 2007, <http://politicom.moldova.org/news/transnistrian-power-wielding-forces-hold-over-ten-opponents-of-breakaway-regime-36276-eng.html>

⁹¹ «Может, время Смирнова и прошло, но он – патриот Приднестровья» (Maybe, it is time for Smirnov to go, but he is a patriot of his country), KM.ru, July, 2011, <http://www.km.ru/node/491853/comments>

Russia, the main stakeholder in the Transnistrian conflict, which was promoting and backing up its own candidate Anatoliy Kaminskiy, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, and the Chairman the Renewal Party, the leading party in Transnistria promoting the interests of the Sheriff Holding, a company which controls all the main industries and companies in Transnistria, including the only cell company and a TV channel.

The preliminary results revealed that a second round was required, which in itself was a big surprise for Russia and the Transnistrian political elite. In the second round, Kaminskiy faced Evgeniy Shevchuk, the former Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, former Chairman of the Renewal Party and an employee of the Sheriff Holding business group⁹² as well as cochairman of the Transnistrian delegation to negotiations with Moldova, who was accused of his attempts to “sell” Transnistria to Moldova and Romania, which would jeopardize the status quo of Transnistria as a quasi-independent entity.⁹³ With Evgeniy Shevchuk, who is of Ukrainian ethnicity and is allegedly supported by his ties in Ukraine and Moldovan businesses, Russia is losing its interest in the breakaway region of Moldova, which according to political analysts may result in Transnistria plunging to a chaos⁹⁴ as Evgeniy Shevchuk will have to deal with both Igor Smirnov, who still retains his stronghold in Transnistria, and his supporters and the omnipotent Sheriff. The situation could be fatal for Transnistria with roughly half a million citizens holding the citizenship of unrecognized Transnistria, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia and united only by the eagerness of the Russian-speaking population to either gain recognition of the independence of the region or integration into Russia and the status of the region as a “free economic zone” enabling its citizens

⁹²Громкая победа Шевчука на выборах в Приднестровье говорит об усталости от “Шерифа” (Loud Victory of Shevchuk in the elections in Transnistria speaks of people being tired of Sheriff), December 2011, ROSBALT News Service, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/exussr/2011/12/27/929037.html>

⁹³ Возникнет Ли Волна Хаоса? <http://www.km.press.md/pridnestrovye/4738-2011-12-22-21-34-45.html>

⁹⁴ Приднестровье ждет результатов президентских выборов, (Transnistria is waiting for elections results), BBC UK, December 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2011/12/111211_pridnestrovie_elections.shtml

to gain from its unrecognized status. There is a high degree of probability that Evgeniy Shevchuk, who has no support from the Transnistrian political and business elite, will be subjugated by the Sheriff Holding business group, which has little interest in human rights and is predominantly driven by profits derived from its criminal business activities in the “grey zone” used as a transit route for human trafficking, smuggling and other activities of organized multinational crime groups.

However, Transnistria continues to be in between a rock and a hard place. The European Court of Human Rights, ECHR, ruled in January 2020, that Russia has violated human rights and right to freedom and security in the breakaway Moldovan region of Transnistria, which it has de facto controlled since it broke away from Moldova in 1992.⁹⁵ Still there is no sign of hope for the future for the beleaguered area, as Russia refuses to withdraw troops claiming that “Conditions haven’t been created yet for the withdrawal of the Operational Group of Russian Forces” said Russian Ambassador to Moldova Oleg Vasnetsov.⁹⁶

In summary, unrecognized Transnistria is a home to the authoritarian regime which subjects its political opponents to harassment, arbitrary detention, persecution and torture.

NATIONALISM IN MOLDOVA

The recent political changes which have crippled Moldova, have also sparked an upsurge of extreme nationalism, which found its way to the disenchanted Moldovans through the promise of European integration. Nationalism plays an important role in the agenda of new Moldovan

⁹⁵ ECHR Rules Russia Guilty of Rights Violations in Transnistria. (<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/10/echr-rules-russia-guilty-of-rights-violations-in-transnistria/>) January 10, 2020

⁹⁶ Envoy points to lack of conditions for pulling Russian forces out of Transnistria. (<https://tass.com/politics/1176023>) July 8, 2020

democrats, who successfully use nationalism card in an atmosphere of total disillusionment and distrust towards the government. The Moldovan democratic elite, which proved to be completely dysfunctional and incoherent, is experimenting with dangerous ideas of well-disguised Nazism, Romanian fascism, neo-Nazism and extreme radical nationalism. Most nationalist parties, which had failed to generate wide public support, underwent certain shape-shifting procedures and now call themselves “democrats.”

As a result of persecution, discrimination, deprivation of economic opportunities and the government’s support and indifference, the number of ethnic minorities including Slavs has dropped in Moldova more than five times since the country’s independence was declared. For example, according to the 1989 census, the number of Ukrainians in Moldova was 600,000. The number of Russians was 562,000. The 2004 statistics showed 283,000 of Ukrainians and 198,000 of Russians.⁹⁷

The increasing nationalism is a disturbing phenomenon in Moldova. Thus, Nazi collaborators have been equated to the veterans of World War II, who had given their lives fighting against the Nazi regime. Dorin Chirtoacă, one of the leaders of the Liberal Democratic Party, annually meets with the veterans of the Romanian Army, one of the Nazis’ allies, and thanks them for their “deeds of arms” in the war. The national television station(s); controlled by the current Moldovan regime, promotes nationalistic ideas by conducting surveys glorifying the Romanian-Moldovan joint Nazi past.⁹⁸ Another member of the Liberal Democratic Party went even further: in an interview granted to one of the news agency, she denied the participation of the Romanian of Ion Antonescu against Jews and Roma in the Holocaust, during the World War II on

⁹⁷ Moldova/ 4.2 Recent policy issues and debates, <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/moldova.php?aid=421>

⁹⁸ Ideologiya fashizma, <http://www.olvia.idknet.com/ol04-11-09.htm>

the territory of Moldova.⁹⁹ Anatol Petrenescu, one of the leaders of a popular nationalist party, the “European Action”, widely known for his anti-Semitism, openly stated, Jews were “a fifth column – Soviet agents, robbers, thieves, criminals, who betrayed Romanian patriots and desecrated churches.”¹⁰⁰ Petrenescu was not criticized or reprimanded for such anti-Semitic statements. On the contrary, he was declared to be an ardent patriot and was allowed to “co-author several history textbooks for schools.”

The Democratic Party and the Socialist Party split society even more. They further divided the country between “agents of Moscow” and “Euro-Unionists,” “titular” and “non-titular,” “locals” and “strangers,” Russian-speaking and Romanian-speaking. The whole idea was to turn them on each other.¹⁰¹

The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) criticized Moldova for the growing anti-Roma, anti-LGBT and racist propaganda on the Internet. It stated that the Moldovan authorities did not do enough to stop this development.¹⁰² In fact, President Dodon helped further this tendency by commenting on a melee which took place in Chisinau on September 23, 2019, when a group of Arab female students attacked the local young woman for her comments regarding their dresses. He stirred the public up against foreigners who did not behave well in “our home.”¹⁰³

The newspapers backed by democratic coalitions such as *Timpul*, further reveal the

⁹⁹ Ekspert o genotside moldavskikh tsygan Rumyniei, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1097822.html>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=279>

¹⁰¹ Evgenii Sholar. Темная сторона Молдовы: Евгений Шоларь о ненависти, национализме и протестном движении (Dark Side Of Moldova: Evgenii Sholar About Hatred, Nationalism and Protest Movement). NewsMaker, August 10, 2018. <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/temnaya-storona-moldovy-evgeniy-sholar-o-nenavisti-natsionalizme-i-protestnom-dviz-38620/>

¹⁰² ЕКРН НАЗВАЛ НЕДОСТАТОЧНЫМИ УСИЛИЯ ВЛАСТЕЙ МОЛДОВЫ ПО НЕДОПУЩЕНИЮ ЯЗЫКА НЕНАВИСТИ К МЕНЬШИНСТВАМ (ECRI Called Moldovan Government’s Effort Of Prevention Of Language Of Hate Insufficient). Infotag, October 3, 2018. http://www.infotag.md/m9_populis/267512/

¹⁰³ Nikolai Pakholnitskii. В Молдове не все дома? Почему комментарий Додона об иностранных студентках назвали ксенофобским (Are They Insane In Moldova? Why Dodon’s Comment Regarding Foreign Students Was Called Xenophobic). NewsMaker, October 1, 2019. <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/v-moldove-ne-vse-doma-pochemu-kommentarij-dodona-ob-inostrannyh-studentkah-nazvali-ksenofobskim/>

nationalist and anti-Semitic stance of the Moldovan democrats. *Timpul* is notorious for publishing Holocaust denial authors, such as Ion Coja and George Buzatu, who were given a lot of positive attention during democrats' parliamentary elections campaign in Moldova.¹⁰⁴ Nationalism plays an important role in the political machinations of the communists and their so-called democratic opponents. Old and well-known enemies such Slavs (Russians and Ukrainians), Gagauz, Jews and Roma are used as scapegoats for the political and social ills of Moldova, and they experience pressure and persecution to push them out of the country, while non-natives are treated as unwanted strangers.

CONCLUSION

Neo-Communists dominated and continue to dominate all spheres of society and to enjoy wide support among the population. The mistreatment, including harassment, physical abuse and persecution is widespread, while highly corrupt police staffed by a large number of neo-Communists and their sympathizers are unable and unwilling to control violent supporters of Moldovan neo-Communists. Moreover, police and other law enforcement agencies, including the security service (SIS), which are indispensable repressive instruments in the hands of the Moldovan government and subject to the high levels of corruption, heavily persecute opposition activities and minorities by using excessive force, physical abuse, intimidation and torture. The political turmoil, which Moldova has been experiencing for the last years, has led to more intolerance and prejudice in society.

¹⁰⁴ Moldova Nationalist rioters storm parliament.
<http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=279>