

MOLDOVA: THE GROWING PAINS OF DEMOCRACY

Igor Munteanu, Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to the USA

Tuesday, January 31, 2012, 2:00 pm
2200 Rayburn House Office Building

It is a privilege to be here and speak at the invitation of the Helsinki Committee of the US Congress today. I am going to address with you those topics that will better describe the on-going efforts to respond to the challenges of the regional and global turmoil, while securing a place for Moldova that is well-deserved by its people. I am here also to speak about the political developments in Moldova, and our steps towards a sustainable conflict settlement in Transnistria, as an indispensable part of the Republic of Moldova.

Political Changes and Prospects for Constitutional Crisis Resolution in Moldova

By Constitution, Moldova is defined as a parliamentary republic (indirect voted President), but with some inherited features that are often similar or comparable with the semi-presidential system (president may dissolve the legislative house, it still runs an amount of powerful competences, as opposed to a decorative President, having more symbolical attributes like in genuine parliamentary systems).

As a result of constitutional re-writing of 2000, a hybrid political system emerged in RM, combining features that are mixed to both – semi-presidential and parliamentary rule, which appeared to be favorable for a super-majority party, but painful for a multi-party coalition. So, the lessons of the last decade of uni-personal rule are really painful. For those who want to learn how this system is ruled, pls read carefully the Freedom House (Nations in Transit) Reports during 2001/2009, which abound in multiple cases of: political harassment, censorship and limitations of human rights and freedoms, more as a rule than singular exceptions.

When in 2009, a pro-western coalition replaced the old-fashioned CPRM in power, they pursued a policy of demolishing and not replacing entirely the ‘vertical of power’ which was built around V.Voronin. This created a genuine democratic environment, pluralistic, but to some extent, unpredictable. In fact, what occurred in Moldova after 2009 was a kind of literal translation of the constitutional reform of 2000 into a boiling pluralistic landscape of competing political groups.

Thus, the Alliance for European Integration was successful to install its Cabinet of Ministers, adopt an Program of economic and political reforms (Rethink Moldova), strengthen its political ties with its two larger neighbors (Romania and Ukraine), upgrade and develop a trustful relationship with EU, but failed to overcome the setback of Presidential elections, having only a slight majority of deputies (53). In a 101 seats-Parliament, this was to little to elect a President (which can be elected with 2/3 of the MPs). And, although the Speaker of the Parliament could uphold generally the competencies of the President, ad interim, but could not avoid anticipated elections, conducted right one year after the termination of a full year in power without a President.

In November 2010, Moldova organized anticipated elections (as a result of the non-election of the President), which resulted in more support for the coalition (they’ve got 58 of mandates, against 42), but again - not sufficient for a new President. This is why, some of the parties have insisted in September 2010 to hold a referendum, aimed at leaving ordinary citizens to vote for their president in a direct vote, but it failed with less than 0,2%. Others proposals included even more ambitious goals to adopt a new Constitution, by referendum, thus, extracting those provisions that would feed inevitable concerns of another round of elections.

But, Constitution can be changed after long deliberations and on a strong basis for national consensus, which is difficult to achieve in a thorny period of economic crisis. Moreover, at a cross-road of difficult economic choices, it is obvious that a new round of anticipated elections will be at odds with the rational behavior and statesmanship during crisis, which requests tranquility, balanced policies, serious leadership,.

Thus, only a parliamentary-elected president in the coming weeks could serve to the country determination to meet its strategic objectives of domestic reform and steady integration with EU. Even today, there is little ground for seeing Moldova in a political deadlock: the Government is fully functional, our EU-driven foreign policy is engaging us in serious economic and political reforms. In 2011, Moldovan economy has registered a 6,4% of annual growth, while Moldovan exports rose by 40%.

The political landscape is equally favorable to this sort of unlocking decisions. The Party of Communists, which was seen as a model of political rigidity and stubborn indoctrination, showed serious signs of decay recently - with 3 MPs (Dodon Group) defecting in October, 2011 from the party, and soon announcing their will to be part of the democratic parties willing to vote a non-affiliated candidate for the President. It seems that the Parliament will vote again in February 2012, this time having simply no way to fail.

A possibility would be for the Parliament to vote again, perhaps in February 2012, and elect a President, endorsed with the votes of both AIE and 3-Socialists. In the same time, I personally think that a constitutional reform in Moldova is inevitable; since political realities show clearly that Moldova can be/will be ruled now by coalition-based parties, and not by hegemonic parties. Thus, the real issue is not if, but when, but Moldovan politicians need to calculate 7 times and cut off only once, in order to preserve its political standing and internal stability.

Changes and Prospects in Transnistria

Moldova does not recognize the legality of elections, nor their claims to seek international recognition, and we call all states to resist the temptation to portray Shevcuck as an outstanding result of democracy. True, population of the region demanded new faced, this is why Shevcuck took a winning ticket, based on a no-confidence vote for Smirnov, but yet he shall demonstrate if he can fly or will be left to fly.

Still, the young politician seems to be addicted to the idea of separation from the other bank of Moldova, an ideology, which was built up in 1991, as a leverage to conserve Soviet Union at its peripheries, and this cannot be encouraged not tolerated. So, getting rid of odious politicians like Smirnov, Antiufeev, is welcomed in Chisinau, but we expect that Tiraspol will be able also to get rid of other odious things, like – the idea of imprisoning people for being politically different (Vardanian) or for keeping the cultural traditions – as in the case of the Schools teaching Romanian language in Transnistria (this case is currently judged at the EHRC in Strassbourg), or of creating artificial obstacles to the movement of people, which are practically the same, with a considerable majority of Moldovans forming the population of the region.

This being stated, I shall of course pay the necessary tribute to the avenue that just began with the so-called elections in Transnistria. This raise hopes that we can progress in strengthening public diplomacy, pursue effective economic integration and restore the need to work together for the benefits of the regional stability, leading to final settlement of the conflict, and reintegration of the region into proper Moldova.

The policy of small steps to ease the life of citizens is right and just. Lifting up taxes for Moldovan goods is clearly an indication of further potential of trade, but here is to be noted that all those restrictions that are canceled right now, and others that might follow soon, have been applied unilaterally by Tiraspol, and never supported in Moldova. We are definitely supporting the replacement of the current peacekeepers with a Civilian Mission of Peacemaking under an international mandate.

We believe that only under such circumstances, peace and prosperity can be ensured to the heavily affected by poverty region, while increasing the confidence-building measures, decreasing security threats, and creating more avenues for international standards on human rights and freedoms for the population. Nevertheless, we want to encourage small steps into the right direction (reintegration), such as – restoring railway transportation, restoring telephone communication, re-inclusion of the region's banking sector into the Moldovan financial system (with respect to the existing rules of the game and financial obligations of the sides).

Moreover, we are ready to include Transnistrian experts as Members of the Delegation of Moldova, running today's negotiations on DCFTA, other real issues, such as Trade Missions, where Transnistrian companies may also join and explore various opportunities of the international markets, but as legal entities, protected by the rules of the WTO.

In conclusion, I would certainly support the idea of all our friends in USA to graduate Moldova from the JVA restrictions, which have been endured too long and whose original meaning has been lost with the termination of the Soviet rule. I do believe that US can essentially assist this process by elevating the status of its participation in the format of negotiations, graduate Moldova from JVA, by allowing it to access the PNTR, better coordinate policy incentives on various forms of post-conflict rehabilitation projects.

The recent power-shift in Transnistria could be a good window of opportunities in various spheres (business, liberalization of the administration, free movement of people). One shall not ignore the hard-security threats, still under the control of those who still are prone to conflict and violence. Therefore, an International Civilian Mission

needs to be designed as a priority to replace the existing so-called peacekeepers, as a structural incentive to peaceful settlement and reintegration of the country.