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EU-MOLDOVA ACTION PLAN: An Unfinished Task or a Complete Failure?

Dumitru Minzarari



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Discussion Paper

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*“All that is necessary for the
triumph of evil is that good
men do nothing”*

Edmund Burke

Preface

In the second issue of the analytical series “Discussion Papers”, edited by the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDSi) “Viitorul”, the intention was to focus on the topic of the EU-Moldova Action Plan (EUMAP), which has so far generated many different approaches. The need for a more serious and thorough public debate in Moldova on this topic became obvious last December, during a conference on European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) organized by the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs in Budapest. The event addressed the possible increased role and contribution of Visegrad Group countries in making the ENP a more effective endeavor.

As a result of discussions there emerged a feeling that certain EU-member participants had a rather incomplete understanding of the real role of the Moldovan government in implementing the EUMAP. Their knowledge of the process seemed to come overwhelmingly from formal interaction with official Chişinău, either diplomatic or through different government proxies. The paper presented on Moldova pointed out to the deliberate actions and inactions of Moldovan leadership that did not allow for the EU-Moldova Action Plan to completely achieve its goals.

After this was met with some degree of skepticism by conference participants, it suddenly became obvious that in fact there were very few other sources than those sponsored by the Moldovan government to cover the EUMAP issue, both through public statements and local media. It also became clear that if civil society does not become more active in discussing this crucial issue, involving the public both at home and abroad, then Moldova’s European partners will only be able to hear one side of the story. As a result this paper was produced, attempting to present to the public¹ a rather new perspective addressing the progress and failures of the Moldovan Government in the course of implementing the EUMAP.

The initial publication of this paper coincides with an important period, namely the termination of the implementation period of the EU-Moldova Action Plan. Even though the term ended in February 2008, the Plan² will undoubtedly continue to serve as a reference point in the political dialogue

¹ The Romanian version of this paper was published in January 2008.

² Henceforth, the EU-Moldova Action Plan will be referred to as the “Plan” or the “Action Plan”.

between EU and Moldova over the next few years. It should be noted, however, that recent discussions on whether the Action Plan was successfully implemented or not generated more disagreement than consensus between authorities and civil society, as well as between the governing party and opposition parties.

Disagreements over the progress of the Action Plan are even more surprising given that many of its objectives and tools were initially met with enthusiasm by major stakeholders in Moldova. During the final phase of the Plan implementation rhetorical clashes between national actors, particularly between central authorities and civil society, increased. The latter has criticized the government for poor performance during these three years of EUMAP implementation. All sorts of such debates have provided valuable insight for analysis, comparison and reflection over the invoked reasons.

The plot thickened due to the fact that even European institutions and certain European partners of official Chişinău have repeatedly expressed their concerns in regard to the Plan, pointing out serious gaps in its implementation. This paper, while assessing as objective the existing criticisms of the poor performance showed by the Moldovan Government in the implementation of the Action Plan, is aiming also to expose the roots of the problem and to identify solutions. It shares the widely accepted opinion that it is the Moldovan political leadership, and especially the country's political system built by it, which is to a very large extent responsible for the failures of the EUMAP.

At the same time this paper also shares the view that only blaming central authorities for their incompetence and inefficiency does not provide viable solutions. Unconstructive and indiscriminate accusations may only encourage those opposition actions which may lead to street demonstrations calling for regime change, which is undesirable in a democratic system that relies on elections to determine political leadership. On the other hand political turmoil is not exactly what Moldova would need in order to advance on its democratic transition path. In other words, this paper assesses existing obstacles and seeks possible solutions without promoting or supporting partisan interests. For this purpose it relies on a number of theoretical findings from democratic transition literature, using statistics from studies and reports reflecting world democratic processes and developments. It also refers to local and foreign media articles that were somehow overlooked or did not find sufficient coverage in existing EUMAP progress reports.

The paper concludes that the Moldovan leadership deliberately does not allow for some elements of the EUMAP to progress. Moreover, it disguises this lack of will to implement certain reforms set out in the Action Plan through simulating institutional activity and efficiency, by mimicking certain processes, or even publicly denying that any problems exist at all.

Another important obstacle in the process of Moldova's European integration is the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Although in a way it sounds like a conspiracy theory, and it is categorically rejected by some opposition members who perceive it as a poor excuse for the current government's

mistakes, the paper insists that Russia is a factor that cannot be ignored in the existing political context. Further, the most recent criticism of the Communist government raised by domestic stakeholders provides some recommendations regarding this issue; however these mostly answer the “what” question and very unconvincingly the “how” one. Such proposals are not unknown to the authorities, yet unfortunately these ideas can only function within perfect models, which do not take into account existing institutional barriers. In fact, a significant number of opposition leaders put a lot of effort into blaming the government and much less into suggesting workable solutions to the identified problems.

The study analyzes the character of methods Russia employs to resist and obstruct Moldova’s European integration efforts and looks into the possibility of improving this situation. In our view a possible solution to this problem is to keep the bilateral relations with Russia as transparent as possible, making it an important topic of public discussion; and to create a strong institutional balance. As a result, Russia will not be able to develop and use different pressure mechanisms on individual Moldovan politicians, transforming their individual interests and vulnerabilities into the country’s vulnerabilities, since the decision power of these politicians will be checked and balanced by other branches of the state power. It will also bring Moldovan central authorities to the recognition of the “curative” role of European partners’ influence, with the EUMAP project contributing to the democratic modernization of the state and the society.

Surprisingly, instead of providing certain grounds for public policy debates and assisting the government this study reaches the conclusion that the core of the problem lies in the very character of the Moldovan governance. Such a finding is altering the scope of the paper, which therefore addresses not only the political decision-makers, but also the civil society as a whole. It specifically targets the foreign partners involved in development and democratization work in Moldova, the academia and private sector, - namely all actors who are interested in the success of the Action Plan goals, aimed at addressing democratic transition challenges that Chişinău faces. This study reveals the need for change in the approaches and strategies employed by the foreign organizations working in the field of economic and political development in Moldova.

The disadvantages of a small state include its inability to cope alone with foreign pressures. One of the methods used in this regard is to balance the source of negative external influence with a positive one, in accordance with one’s own interests. Due to the geographical proximity and commonly shared experience as ex-Soviet bloc countries, the Visegrad Group could become an important and effective source of assistance from inside the European Union. This is particularly realistic, since the Group members do share this idea. However the potential of support that they can provide has its limitations. When it comes to Moldova, Visegrad Group members have somewhat different interests and approaches. Some of them are relatively sensitive to the Kremlin’s requests concerning EU relations with former Soviet republics. This

study will attempt to cover some of these conflicting interests, looking for models of efficient cooperation with the Visegrad Group.

Since the present study aims to identify problems, avoiding the support of any partisan ideas or positions, we tried to maintain its realistic and practical character. When identifying obstacles, we tried to resort only to critiques of a technical nature and less to moral critiques, trying to avoid any ideological critiques whatsoever. We strongly believe that only such an approach has higher chances in succeeding to assess the outlined political obstacles and make possible the achievement of proposed results.³ In fact, we distanced ourselves from similar studies on this topic, which only recorded the existing problems in the EUMAP implementation. Our goal was to thoroughly research and highlight the roots of existing problems and the factors which contributed to their emergence and deterioration.

Deliberately thwarting the Action Plan

In order to better understand why the Action Plan implementation failed as initially envisaged it is necessary to examine this process from a different perspective. To start with it is useful to emphasize that while the EUMAP aims at supporting Moldova's European integration aspirations (which were publicly declared by official Chişinău), it also provides clearly defined and politically accepted goals⁴. If we deconstruct the text of the Plan, meaning trying to understand the fundamental framework in both its explicit and implicit forms, excluding the elements that complicate its essence and which are only auxiliary, it is clear that EUMAP aims at nothing less than a transformation of the political system in Moldova under the principles of democratization, establishment of a competitive political regime, and a functional and competitive economy, as well as the social, educational and cultural modernization of this ex-Soviet society.

Analysts have argued that these essential objectives for a post-Soviet transition generate fundamental frictions between the proposed goals and the ability to implement them. What is not always mentioned is the rational choice paradox that affects core actors of the political process – to what extent a rational actor will accept the change of his/her existing status for the sake of some general objectives, such as the modernization of the country. Or for how long will the political leadership be able to relatively balance the interests of all its political components like hesitators and reformists, crypto-conservatives and opportunists, loyalists and revolutionaries? The growing ambiguity about the country's strategic course and the "ideological drift", built only on electoral opportunism and selective coverage of transformation goals will unavoidably lead Moldova to a sound failure as concerns the Action Plan. And such an approach will bring grave consequences for all members of the society, both citizens and governance.

³ Raymond Aron, "Opium Intelktualov," *Logos*, No. 6 (51) 2005, p. 187-188

⁴ European Union – Moldova Action Plan,
http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/action_plans/moldova_enp_ap_final_en.pdf

Another intention of this study is to generate a few systemic questions in regard to the existing capacity to implement the Action Plan, the motivation that guides the involved actors, and generally, the feasibility of the EUMAP in its existing form and mechanism. Risking the blame of excessive simplification the EUMAP and the term of “democratic transformation” may be used as synonyms throughout the study. The Action Plan implies the building of institutional balances that would not permit any single political force to monopolize the political power; the creation of necessary conditions for efficient functioning of the rule of law and the strengthening of democratic institutions in Moldova. It is this set of conditions that were meant to be the core of EUMAP structure, to provide stability and economic growth while at the same time promoting Moldova’s institutional integration into the European Union.

If we are to accept and agree with the above statement then it is crystal clear that the Plan’s success was jeopardized not as much because of its incomplete implementation by the Moldovan Government, as it was by the failure of key influential political elites in Moldova to accept its consequences. And this in fact should be qualified as a deliberate failure. Compared to the beginning of 2005 when the Action Plan was signed, the situation in some of the document’s key areas stagnated or even deteriorated. Independent assessment and limited progress reports published during the implementation phase both by EU partners⁵ and Moldovan civil society⁶ showed the presence of serious problems in the field of democratic institutions: corruption is widespread, media freedom is threatened, the judicial system lacks independence, and state interference in business has become a major obstacle for economic development.⁷

The prevalent opinion in Moldova today reflects the idea that the failure of Moldovan leadership to implement the EUMAP is mostly due to the lack of technical expertise. There is another belief that the problem persists not only because of the governing gerontocracy – it is also explained by the very limited political mandate that the Moldovan Government has. This is aggravated by the persistence of authoritarian reactions in the existing power structure, and by reduced, insufficient communication concerning the ends and means of expected political transformation. However such a statement does not provide sufficient explanatory power, because the Communist Government proved more than once its capacity to achieve its proposed objectives. Yet it was only when it wanted to and was truly interested in the objectives.

In fact the present government was the first in Moldova’s post-Soviet history to effectively crush some aspects of organized crime in Moldova, even though

⁵ “Strategy for Development Cooperation with the Republic of Moldova: January 2007 – December 2010,” Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, pp. 2-5,
<http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/03/96/44/2303d476.pdf>

⁶ Expert-Grup and Adept, “European Union – Republic of Moldova Action Plan: Assessment of Progress in the 3rd Quarter of 2007,” *Euromonitor*, No.2 (8), 2nd ed., <http://www.e-democracy.md/files/euromonitor08en.pdf>

⁷ “Moldova ENP Progress Report,” 4 December 2006, p.3,
http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/sec06_1506-2_en.pdf

the opposition press blamed afterwards the government for gradually replacing the dispersed organized crime structures with its own mechanisms.⁸

Also, the Voronin administration has displayed a certain degree of perseverance in the case of a few other projects. Last year, unlike anytime before, the construction of a series of memorials commemorating the Soviet past was carried out extremely quickly. Another major project run by the governing Communist Party of Moldova, which was implemented despite the opposition's protests, was the abolishment of a new, Western-sponsored administrative division of Moldova and the return to the old Soviet type of administrative structure. This was done in complete disregard of the fact that considerable resources and efforts were invested for the reorganization and decentralization of the local public administration structure of Moldova. The critiques of Communist government claimed that by this they wanted to increase the financial dependence of the regions on the central government. It happened despite and contrary to the recommendations of some Western partners who contributed financially to this local public administration reform.

Another major project of the Moldovan Communists has a more ideological nature. It refers to their efforts of "rehabilitation" of Soviet historiography regarding the identity of Moldovan/Romanian ethnicities and the plenary use of the state resources to create a single official viewpoint – an endeavor that generated protests and tensions in the society. Whenever intended the current Moldovan leadership acted as it pleased, unilaterally and without even discussing in good faith with the opposition. Therefore it is wrong to insist that the Voronin administration lacks the capability to implement the Action Plan, since it has an overwhelming control over all three branches of state power and has proved more than once its ability to carry out projects even against the fierce resistance of the opposition forces.

Before drawing conclusions regarding the real reasons behind EUMAP's failure, we should take a closer look at the areas of the document in which the government did not achieve any palpable success. After doing this, one could clearly observe that in all these cases it is the political leadership that is both the perpetrator and the beneficiary of the failures to carry out the Plan. Revealingly, the elements of the Action Plan that "lag behind" are exactly those which, if implemented, will deprive PCRM of their political and economic advantage in comparison with domestic competing parties and interest groups. Given that the governing Communist Party proved the capacity to achieve its objectives, realizing its interest in preserving tight control over the domestic political system, and understanding that the aim of the Action Plan is to provide and consolidate the institutional independence of the branches of the state power, then it is very easy to solve this charade. During 2007 it became clear that the governing party has no interest in the main EUMAP objectives. Moreover, it perceives them as threats to their monopolist control of political power in Moldova.

⁸ N. Negru, "White and Black: Trade House 'Soyuz', Trade Center 'PCRM'," [Alb și Negru: Casa de Comerț 'Soiuz', Centrul Comercial 'PCRM'], *Jurnal de Chișinău*, No. 642, 30 November 2007, <http://www.jurnal.md/article/4737/>

In the June 2007 general local elections PCRM suffered a significant blow, reflected in a considerable loss of voters. This happened despite the fact that the governing party largely used administrative resources, such as launching populist projects funded with public money; controlled the public TV and radio channels,⁹ as well as the private TV channel NIT,¹⁰ which have the largest coverage in the country. Without these advantages and tools built in the political system and abused by PCRM, and which the EUMAP aims at eliminating, the electoral performance of the governing party would have been even more modest. In this case, it is not surprising that the Communist faction refused to discuss EUMAP progress at the plenary session of the Parliament as the opposition proposed at the end of 2007. Actual implementation of the European Union-Moldova Action Plan threatens the governing PCRM because it would launch processes that could spell the beginning of the end for the Communist power monopoly.

EU – an alien habitat for Moldovan Communists

Research on post-totalitarian states struggling with transition challenges and striving to promote democratic reforms reveals several major obstacles in the way of their democratization. First of all, the interests of influential political and economical elites must be taken into account. If the suggested democratic reforms are perceived as a source of threat to the private interests of these elites, having the potential to shake the established influence structures as well as the economic mechanisms and relations, then elites will vehemently oppose the transformations. On the other hand, politicians receive economic support from various interest groups and as a result they very often become their hostages, ending up as protectors of what have become commonly shared interests. The validity of this statement for Moldova is supported by the assessments of Moldova's progress in the implementation of the Action Plan, which revealed an increasing interference of the state in the private business sector.¹¹ In other words mechanisms of state power are used to promote certain private economic interests. To strengthen this point, a study carried out last year by IDIS experts concluded that 71% of national wealth is owned by five big domestic joint-stock companies.¹²

This and other facts confirmed by numerous press articles show that during their two consecutive terms in power, the governing PCRM has managed to build an economic-financial architecture aimed at protecting their interests. The strengthening of democratic institutions in Moldova, as suggested by

⁹ ODIHR/OSCE, "Final Report on the 3 and 7 June 2007 Local Elections in Moldova," 21 September 2007, http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/09/26372_en.pdf

¹⁰ ODIHR/OSCE, "2007 Local Elections in Moldova: Media Monitoring Report," 11 June 2007, http://www.osce.org/documents/html/pdfhtml/25023_en.pdf.html, and the "Full Press Statement on the Second Round of Local Elections in Moldova," 17 June 2007, http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/06/25167_en.pdf

¹¹ Moldova ENP Progress Report, European Commission Working Document, 4 December 2006, p.3, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/sec06_1506-2_en.pdf

¹² Moldova Azi Web-Portal, "Anatol Taranu: Moldova is a Country of Oligarchic Capitalism," [Anatol Taranu: Moldova este o tara a capitalismului oligarhic], 1 March 2007, <http://www.azi.md/news?ID=43420>

EUMAP, would lead to the PCRM's loss of power, or at least deprivation of its monopoly over it, due to the weakening of their grasp on key political and economic mechanisms. Stronger democratic institutions would result in the redistribution of access to economic commodities and financial potential. It is an unfortunate prospect for the existing big capital owners in Moldova, and forces them to pressure PCRM to stay in power. As such, this party that entered Moldovan politics through democratic elections has begun to resist the objective forces that could limit or take away its monopolist control. Consequently the governing party started to promote tools that would facilitate the manipulation of elections and political system, allowing its prolonged stay in power. No wonder that Russia has become an attractive model for PCRM, with its authoritarian system, excessive use of administrative resources, and political technologies. There are a number of arguments supporting this claim. Authoritarian systems dominated by corrupt and oligarchic national elites are very similar, sharing a number of common features.

One of these features is *(1) establishing control over the profitable business and major capital flow* in the country. In order to survive, the authoritarian government requires financial resources, ideally, to ensure its financial independence. This is meant to protect it from foreign (Western) dependence and/or pressure to democratize, since the West makes financial assistance conditional on the promotion of democratic reforms. An obvious example is the Russian government, which took control over all areas with the highest revenue potential, insisting on their "strategic" character, which obviously refers to oil and gas deposits. A similar situation can be seen in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Moldova has also shown signs that this phenomenon of governmental control over the major businesses is becoming more prominent in its domestic affairs.¹³ It has already drawn the attention of foreigners. The EU Special Representative for Moldova Kalman Miszei has mentioned in a recent interview that for Moldova to successfully attract foreign investors it should eliminate the illegal intervention of state officials in the business environment at all levels.¹⁴

Given the need to ensure at least a nominal legitimacy and to be able to publicly explain the cases of persecution of their opponents, authoritarian governments make sure they are able to exert *(2) absolute control over the*

¹³ This wide-spread in Moldova phenomenon has found a public resonance especially in the opposition's media. The trend was indirectly confirmed in an interview with Oleg Voronin, the president's son, published by the Moldovan *Vip Magazin*. In that interview O. Voronin rejects accusations of the kind mentioned in an article published by the Russian News Agency *Novyi Region 2*, "Oleg Voronin: Some Persons Find it Convenient to Portrait the President's Son as a Racketeer," [Олег Воронин: кому-то выгодно представлять сына молдавского президента рэкетиром], 6 March 2007, <http://www.nr2.ru/pmr/108032.html>. Another indirect confirmation comes from the private talks with the foreign experts and officials. At the end of 2007 during such a conversation a foreigner has compared Moldova's economy to pie, with its slices being already divided among the domestic influential actors; who were not willing to share the pie with potential foreign investors, discouraging foreigners to bring their business to Moldova. Another telling case is the story revealed also in a private dialogue, claiming foreign companies in Moldova received frequent letters from the Moldova's top governmental institutions, requesting funds to be donated as "charity" and "humanitarian assistance". The most striking part of the story was that foreign companies were told the exact amount they were supposed to "donate", and there were no guarantees that the money would end up for the purposes mentioned in the letters.

¹⁴ BASA-Press News Agency, "Interview with Kalman Miszei," 11 January 2008, <http://www.basa.md/?c=news&id=335269#335269>

judicial system. The Basmannyi Court in Moscow is well-known for the fabricated indictment of the businessman Hodorkovski and his partners. Other good examples in this regards are Belarusian courts and the Andijan case in Uzbekistan. In Moldova, there are many claims that the Pasat case was politically motivated. Yet even without this example it is so obvious that the Moldovan judiciary faces a huge problem as concerns its independence from state authorities.¹⁵

One more feature specific to autocratic governance is the (3) *control over the institutions in charge of public order* and authorized to use force on the state territory. This tool is employed mainly to harass the opposition, disperse protests, persecute political opponents, etc. In recent years cases related to the misuses of state force against its own citizens were witnessed in Russia¹⁶, Belarus, Azerbaijan, as well as in Moldova.¹⁷ Moldovan police have brutally harassed opposition leaders and journalists in a number of cases, especially before last summer's elections¹⁸.

In order to function efficiently any government, even a totalitarian one, requires the cooperation or tacit agreement of the population and the groups or institutions it identifies with.¹⁹ In the case of authoritarian political systems, this condition implies the government's efforts to keep the population out of politics, either uninterested or being persuaded it cannot change anything. The government efforts to marginalize or eliminate the ideas that contradict the official ideology are also a part of this equation.

The Republic of Moldova is a fragment of a totalitarian system, namely the Soviet Union. It inherited a lot from the Soviet totalitarian system. The most "valuable" legacy (from the perspective of an authoritarian state's ability to survive) is represented by its politically illiterate, passive and often completely apathetic population²⁰. Communication studies showed that a less educated public is an easier subject to stylistic and rhetorical manipulations.²¹

¹⁵ "Freedom in the World – Moldova," Freedom House Report 2007,

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2007&country=7232>

¹⁶ Eho Mosckvy Radio Show "Plavlennyi Syrok", presented by Vyktor Shenderovichi, 29 December 2007, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/plsyrok/>

¹⁷ BBCRomanian.com, "Human Rights Violations in Moldova," [Incalcari ale dreptului omului in Republica Moldova], 6 March, 2007,

http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2007/03/070306_moldova_drepturile_omului.shtml

¹⁸ BBCRomanian.com, "15 LP Members in Police Detention for Few Hours," [15 membri ai PL retinuti de politie timp de citeva ore], 27 March 2007,

http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2007/03/070327_chisinau_arestari.shtml

¹⁹ Gene Sharp, „From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation,” *The Albert Einstein Institution*, 2002, p. 22

²⁰ The May 2007 issue of "The Barometer of Public Opinion", a public opinion poll conducted by the Center for Sociological Research and Marketing CBX AXA at the request of the Institute for Public Policies, showed that only 2.8% of respondents were watching the Parliament sessions broadcast on public TV and radio, and another 13.6% claimed they did it often (B13). This case uncovers the very low interest of the population in the political life of their country in general and in the work of the Parliament in particular. Other examples from the poll reveal the vulnerability of a large part of the population to populist messages.

²¹ G. Ray Funkhouser and Nathan Maccoby, „An Experimental Study on Communicating Specialized Science Information To a Lay Audience”, *Communication Research*, 1974:1, p. 110

Authoritarian governance needs to control a country's information space in order to ensure that only its messages reach the population or it has an informational dominance. Statistics show that television in Moldova is the most important news source, with an audience level of 72.7%, and it is considered the most trustworthy (52.6%), followed by radio (12.6%).²² This explains why public television and the private NIT channel, the only ones broadcasting over the entire country, are under Communist governing party control. The same applies to the public radio station, which is also able to cover entire Moldova. The public company Teleradio-Moldova continues to remain financially dependent on the present government, with its public character merely fictional, and in fact annulled.²³ Through exerting such control another goal of the authoritarian governance is achieved, namely the (4) *control and monopoly of the informational space*.

The (5) *centralization of power* or the establishment of the so-called "vertical of power", as it is named in Russia, is another obligatory part of the construction of an authoritarian state. In Moldova this phenomenon was represented through the successful efforts of the PCRM to destroy at the beginning of their first term in office the newly created public administration system, which offered the regions a significantly higher degree of administrative and financial autonomy. The return to the Soviet-era administrative structures, namely the "rayons", has had not only a symbolic significance but also a practical one. Existing research on authoritarian states found that through such actions governments preserve their influence by generating and encouraging the dependency of the population on the state in terms of both security needs and preservation of basic living conditions. It is this kind of dependency that the Moldovan leadership is striving to preserve, since the population that has the liberty of free choice is more capable of protecting its rights. In fact, the authoritarian tendencies of the governing party were visible already in 2001 when it came to power, abolishing the new administrative structure and returning to the old one. The purpose of this action was to install a stronger control over the administrative districts, increasing their dependency on the center and excluding the possibility of financial independence for regions with higher economic potential.

In authoritarian states the previous component also entails control over legislative power, or when this is not possible then the "immobilization" of the lawmaking body through a series of internal political struggles is attained. The Moldovan case fits well into this trend, because as a result of elections the Moldovan Parliament found itself under the total control of the PCRM. Even though by its Constitution Moldova is a parliamentary country, it de facto became a presidential one. It is governed by President Vladimir Voronin, who remains at the same time the leader of the Communist Party. As a result, the separation of powers in the state, already shaky at the time, did not consolidate but instead the "vertical of power" was strengthened. The practice when the parliamentary majority voted based on ideology and personal gains while

²² CBS AXA and IPP, "The Barometer of Public Opinion," November 2007

²³ ODIHR/OSCE Press Statement, "Polling in Second Round of Moldova's Local Elections Slightly Improved, but Serious Shortcomings Remain," 17 June 2007, p.2, http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/06/25167_en.pdf

deciding on important public policies has become widespread. This resulted in the opposition being excluded from the decision-making process, promoting political tension and decreasing the number of alternative policies in Moldova. And while this may not be a very severe case in democratic countries, this contributes to the growth of authoritarianism in transition states, because their political systems lack the checks and balances that would prevent the misuse of political power.

There is yet another important factor that cannot be ignored and which is very specific to the majority of authoritarian political systems. We already mentioned their interest in keeping the masses away from politics, cultivating indifference, political illiteracy, and the idea that things are irrevocable and immutable. In order for these efforts to succeed, authoritarian governments will attempt to control internal tension among the masses, preserving it at a “safe” level. The big protests and revolts usually break up when social tension is not contained by authorities, allowing for an emerged leader or a pivotal idea to guide the protest outbreak. For this reason, autocratic governments seek first of all to ensure endurable living standards, launching populist actions and projects, which as a rule are largely advertised through the major media outlets it controls. This way a (6) *mechanism of actions aimed at diminishing the tensions* inside society is set up, which plays the role of a lightning rod by preventing protests from reaching a critical threshold. In Moldova this phenomenon is especially described by PCRM propaganda actions, which largely inflate and publicize subjects like protection of socially vulnerable groups, the building or renovation of roads, public transportation lines and various projects of cultural and religious significance. It targets the perceptions of the masses, aiming among others at creating the impression of an increase in salaries and pensions by making public inaccurate statistics.

In the recent years one of the main elements that contributed to the decrease of tensions inside society was the large amount of foreign remittances sent to Moldova by Moldovan citizens working abroad, both legally and illegally. Existing data estimate around 600,000-900,000 Moldovans engaged in working activities abroad, providing to their relatives close to one annual GDP of the country. The resulting effect is that the money from abroad allowed their relatives left in Moldova to enjoy a decent life style, and not to feel the consequences of living in one of the poorest countries in Europe. Foreign remittances also generate positive expectations and perceptions regarding the future,²⁴ preventing the accumulation of social unrest potential.

Of increasing significance, lately, has become the specific relation between the Government and the Orthodox Church, a strange cooperation that is developing at present both in Russia and Moldova. We assert that this peculiar partnership has the same goal, namely, controlling a possible outburst of social unrest. By using Church assistance the effort is projected to cultivate among the flock loyalty to authorities. Keeping in mind that nationalism and communism are rather unattractive ideologies for Moldovans, and an

²⁴ According to the November 2007 issue of *The Barometer of Public Opinion*, around 31% of respondents believed they will experience better standards of living in the next year, and 31.6% considered their standards of living will not change.

ideological vacuum cannot exist, the Church is eager to fill the ideological gap created in Moldovan society. This makes it more powerful and influential. Thus, the PCRM utilizes the Church, namely the Metropolis of Moldova, as an *(7) ideological and spiritual tool of control* in order to increase its capacity for managing the population. It does so regardless of the fact that gives advantage to a single church, disadvantaging the others, and violates the principle of separation of church and state. It provides the ground for inter-confessional tensions, which authorities eagerly explore in political games and during elections.

This cooperation between the governing political power in Chişinău and a segment of the Orthodox Church represents an extremely important aspect in the context of our study, considering the latest polls, which show that 84% of the population trusts in the Church.²⁵ Misusing their place in power to generate funds, the PCRM financed a number of projects for the building and renovation of churches and monasteries. Accordingly, President Voronin's request that the Church should support the Communists in the 2009 elections²⁶ hardly surprised anybody. On 10 July 2007 during a meeting with the priesthood at the Condriţa monastery, where only "pocket" journalists were allowed to come, the President was flattered by a priest's statement, saying: "You are our father, we will do it the way you want it. We are the boat, and you are the helmsman." The head of state, in his turn, fulfilled the request of the clergy from the Metropolis of Moldova and literally ordered Parliament to modify the draft law on cults, which was already discussed and agreed upon with European legal institutions. Later, the Moldovan mass-media has claimed that President Vladimir Voronin promised the introduction of compulsory study of religion in high schools, in case his party wins the 2009 elections. This kind of cooperation proved very fruitful for Communists, since even during the general local elections last year clergy from the Metropolis of Moldova campaigned for them, urging their parishioners to vote for PCRM²⁷, while discrediting candidates from the opposition. In addition, Moldovan president is continuously generating and exploiting the tensions between the Metropolis of Moldova, subordinated to the Russian Patriarchy, and the Metropolis of Bessarabia, which falls under the Romanian Patriarchy, seeking to mobilize support among parts of the population for his anti-Romanian policies.

There is no doubt that these seven elements descriptive of authoritarian regimes are massively employed by the Communist governance. They are used by the PCRM to extend its stay in power, by manipulating public opinion, simulating democratic institutions and processes, and by attempting to manage elections through fraudulent means.

²⁵ Info-Prim Neo News Agency, "PCRM Continues to be the Favorite Party in Moldova," [PCRM continue sa ramina favoritul alegerilor], 29 December 2007, <http://info-prim.md/?a=10&nD=2007/12/29&ay=12361>

²⁶ Flux, "Voronin Requested the Support of Priesthood for PCRM in the 2009 Elections," [Voronin a cerut ca preotii sa sustine PCRM la alegerile dn 2009], 22 July 2007, <http://www.basarabeni.ro/stiri.php?action=read&pagina=681>

²⁷ Coalition-2007, "Monitoring the Electoral Process at the General Local Elections in Moldova," [Monitorizarea procesului electoral la alegerile generale locale din RM], Report no. 3, 10-30 May 2007, p.7, <http://www.interlic.md/files/Raport-rom-III-final-rom.doc>

It is on the eve and during elections when it is especially clear how important are such techniques in order for the authoritarian regimes to maintain their grip on power. It is then when the legislative branch comes under increasing pressure to modify the electoral laws and other rules which will provide the conditions for elections so that they favor the governing party and puts the opposition at a disadvantage. Thus, during the 2007 summer elections in Moldova the PCRM insisted on changing the procedures for debates, allowing for tighter control over them; it also voted an increase in the amount of money that was to be used by electoral candidates. At present the Parliament of Moldova is discussing a new draft of the law, which will change the electoral threshold for political parties to enter the parliament; will prohibit electoral blocs; and will modify the procedure for financing the electoral campaigns of political parties, which overall is meant to strongly tip the balance in favor of the governing Communist Party.

It is obvious that the current political system cloned by the PCRM resembles the European originals only in appearance, and not in functions or substance. It was in fact meant to be so, in order to please the West with the form, while continuing to benefit from the authoritarian mechanisms hidden under the surface. Because of this, a genuine and complete institutional integration into the EU would deprive the PCRM of its ability to misuse the political power. Communists would lose all their advantages acquired during their governance. An institutional integration into the EU would breed fair political competition and equal opportunities, which in fact will accelerate the decline of the PCRM, since it will result in loss of the influence and political power it possesses at the moment.

Between Russian authoritarianism and Western realism

Obviously the PCRM has no interest in losing power, and there are numerous signs of how determined it is to maintain its hegemonic grip on the system of governance in Moldova. Beyond considering the natural reflex of a political actor, one should also examine this issue assessing the effect of a possible change of power on the whole political scene. The PCRM period in government did not make Moldova more democratic or prosperous, while the system of political parties became even more unstable and unbalanced than it used to be before 2001. Every new election campaign turns into a life and death struggle among increasingly polarized political forces. Citizens become more and more detached from the political process.

The president's panic of losing power was visible on 28 June 2007 at the meeting with foreign diplomats invited to his Condița residence, shortly after the elections in which his party suffered a painful blow. His words when he addressed his guests carried a bitter taste of disappointment; while he stated that the Western partners of his country did not provide enough assistance to Moldova when it was facing Russia's pressure alone, he seemed to also imply indirectly that their financial support was not sufficient. Additionally, Voronin cast doubts whether the Western interest in the withdrawal of Russian troops

from Transnistria was genuine, claiming the West used the issue of withdrawal only to annoy Russia.

It was before an audience that included the Russian ambassador that Vladimir Voronin revealed his irritation at the fact that Western election observers criticized the way his PCRM party misused its position in power. This instance was assessed by several observers as a possible sign of a change in Chişinău's foreign affairs priorities²⁸ or as an attempt by Vladimir Voronin to accommodate Russia two days before his meeting with president Putin. However this gesture of the Moldovan president may have had actually a more profound meaning. It clearly revealed Voronin's superficial knowledge of the way the EU as an organization is functioning, its mechanisms and procedures; and his Soviet nomenklatura-type judgment, which perceives Western actions as inevitable targeted against Russia. It provided a rare inside into his political culture and his real way of thinking, and not the one that become attached to the liberal virtual image his aids have striven to build. This way of thinking does not significantly differ from that shared by the leaders of separatist Transnistria, or by the Russian officials. The Kremlin poisoned the Russian population with very similar anti-Western ideas, aiming at mobilizing it according to the "besieged fortress" principle.

It looks like Vladimir Voronin, when pushed into a corner by the Kremlin's 2003 Kozak Memorandum, counted heavily on the fact that if he attacked harshly Moscow's policies in Moldova, then he would receive unconditional support and assistance from the West. Apparently, presidential advisers and strategists considered the West through the lenses of Cold War practices, recalling probably how the USA, in order to confront effectively the Soviet Union, used to support certain totalitarian regimes disregarding the way they governed their people. It seems the Communist government hoped that if it uses a harsher rhetoric with the Russian Federation, then Western money will flow in abundance to Moldova, while at the same time Western capitals will be inclined to tolerate its authoritarian governing practices.

It is difficult to otherwise explain these actions of Voronin. Moldovan leadership irresponsibly ignored the very clear signals suggesting that Russia was going to use against Moldova trade and economic pressure. It did not even make an attempt (!) to diminish its dependence on Russia so that a possible response from Moscow to Chisinau's heated rhetoric could have had less damaging impact on Moldovan economy. Therefore the interpretation of the events offered above seems to be the only plausible one, considering both the accusations against the Western diplomats that claimed insufficient assistance in confronting Russia and the disastrous foreign policy towards Russia promoted by the incumbent Communist Party, which at best can be described as a political venture and gambling. This brings us to another conclusion, suggesting the reader to think about the sheer incompetence that Moldovan leadership displayed.

²⁸ Vladimir Socor, "Is Moldova's President Dropping the European Banner?", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol.4, no. 127, 29 iunie 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2372261

However the PCRM's dreams to have its hands free at home did not come true, to president Voronin's significant disappointment. Both EU and U.S. expressed their dissatisfaction and criticism during the last year's elections, using both subtle and more open ways to do so. Western partners also insisted on the fact that Chisinau genuinely continues the development and promotion of democratic institutions. On the other hand, elections in Gagauzia and later on in Chisinau suggested that in a competitive political system the risk for the Communists to be pushed to the edge of political highway increases significantly. This is where the true nature of the Communist government was fully revealed – the PCRM high echelon, mainly represented by Soviet-style nomenklatura and bureaucrats, could not do anything but employ authoritarian methods during and after elections, benefiting from and misusing their control over the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the state power. Also the reprehensive rhetoric and language put into use by the Moldovan president when addressing Western diplomats at Condrita, and his following suggestion that Russia is Moldova's true friend are very telling.

What is more indicative, however, is the fact that the frozen relations between Chisinau and Moscow improved immediately after the 2007 local elections in Moldova. There is an increasing body of evidence suggesting that Voronin, possibly also under the pressure from his party comrades, and already convinced that the West is not willing to tolerate his party attempts at manipulating elections, could have changed his policy priorities and stakes. As such, the Russian governing and election model becomes a very attractive one for an interest group or a political party willing to avoid losing its dominating position on domestic political arena.

In current conditions the best way to discourage democratic transition regress in Moldova would be a stronger Western criticism of the incumbent party, conditioning their financial support to Chisinau. The Communist government continues to be in need of financial assistance from the Western organizations and partners. In fact it allows them to preserve a reduced budget deficit while at the same time supporting unreasonable social and populist programs, which otherwise would be financially unsustainable. Current Moldovan leadership still needs the West for the cash reason and because the West's recognition provides the incumbent Communist party with a strong domestic legitimacy. On the other hand, in order to maintain the appearance of economic growth, PCRM needs to avoid another commercial-economic confrontation with Russia. Therefore, Moldovan leadership faces the dilemma of depending greatly on the support from two international actors that seem to have conflicting interests in Moldova. Whereas one is putting efforts and resources into promoting democratic transition, another actor is trying to hinder it.

It came to nobody's surprise when during his visit to Chisinau in November 2005 Andrei Kokoshin, the chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on CIS affairs and relations with compatriots has openly displayed his strong disapproval of the Moldova's European aspirations. Back in Moscow, in an interview with Russian journalists, Kokoshin stressed that "if Moldova continues to count on the integration into EU institutions, it will risk its status of strategic partner with Russia". He explained his first phrase revealing that

“building strategic ties with both EU and Russia is difficult because Brussels and Moscow are competitors.”²⁹

The logic behind this opposition of Moscow towards Chisinau’s integration into EU institutions is that such an accession process will contribute to the creation of a genuine democratic system in Moldova, with functional institutional checks and balances. As a result, such a political system, by excluding the absolute control of a single party or interest group, will be significantly less vulnerable to external pressure and therefore much more difficult to control by Russia. To the contrary, establishing an authoritarian system in Moldova, following the Russian model, would be much more preferable for Moscow. Controlling just one domestic actor in Moldova that dominates all three branches of state power, allows an external player to have control over the whole country.

Russia’s ability to influence the process of Moldova’s integration into European institutions should not be overlooked. At present, the tensions between the West and Russia are growing, with one of the key contributing reasons being the resentment of Russian elites towards an increasing involvement of the West in the post-Soviet area. Sooner or later this competition between the two big players will get a clearer form and shape in Moldova.

The spread of a recent tendency in the post-Soviet countries labeled by observers and researchers as “putinism”³⁰, which is becoming rather attractive for the PCRM, is not possible to ignore. Confirming this phenomenon the Communist Party in Moldova has modified in the pre-election year the laws on political parties and the Electoral Code, so that it creates more advantages to them in the forthcoming parliamentary elections, while disadvantaging the opposition. These are not the only indicators, since the PCRM is making use of an increasing number of the “sovereign democracy” techniques used by Putin administration to consolidate Kremlin’s power in Russia.

The PCRM governance model does not always convince the enthusiasts of black-and-white or clear-cut scenarios with an obvious display of authoritarianism, because it skillfully disguises its authoritarian features under a democratic façade. It has come the time when corrupt, oligarchic and illiberal national elites understood that a political system carrying a democratic cloak, with a fictitious parliament and displaying an illusion of pluralism is easier to control and therefore is more attractive to them, then the one which does not have such a deceiving cover, and exposes its true nature.³¹ And its attractiveness is also explained by these elites’ desire to look nice in the eyes of the West. In order to maintain such a system the elites use democratic discourse intending to present authoritarian actions so that they look acceptable to the public. Thus, the main goal is to build a political system that

²⁹ Infotag News Agency, “Moldovan Presidents is Looking in Moscow for a Solution of the Energy Issue,” [Президент Молдовы обсуждает в Москве вопросы, связанные с решением энергетических проблем], 26 November 2005, <http://press.try.md/view.php?idb=Main&id=67798>

³⁰ InoSmi Portal, “The Guardian: Russia Could Start Exporting Putinism,” [Россия может начать экспорт путинизма], 21 November 2007, <http://www.inosmi.ru/stories/01/05/29/2996/237946.html>

³¹ Ibid.

looks like a democratic one in appearance, yet with institutions that continue to function autocratically, protecting the monopoly on power of a single political force.³²

Blocking Moldova's accession into EU

To many observers an authoritarian fallback in Moldova seemed quite an implausible scenario until very recently. However the disappointment displayed by president Voronin at Condrita was not guided only by his misunderstanding and misinterpretations of the EU's actions and inactions. Moldovan president and other officials were addressed by few EU member states leaders with suggestions to solve their country's problems with Russia within a bilateral framework. In other words they told Moldovan leadership to not count on any support from them. Even the German chancellor Angela Merkel has expressed a similar position talking to Voronin, which was rightly understood by Moldovan leadership that these EU states wanted Moldova to make concessions to Russia.

On the other hand, concessions made by Chisinau to Moscow will lead to a complete loss of its political sovereignty and the renouncement of its European integration option. There is no doubt that the Communist Government deserves a part of the blame for this kind of treatment by EU countries, paying the price for its double-faced and ambiguous foreign policy, and for doing clumsy attempts to maneuver between the West and Russia. At the same time the ability of Russia to prevail in the contest for lobbying European states should also be considered. In a recent study of the European Council on Foreign Relations this capacity of Russia to influence the perceptions of EU states towards post-Soviet countries was well described.³³

The study separated EU members into five groups, one of which is the "Trojan Horses" whose members ended up in defending Russian interests inside the EU and even used their veto power to obstruct the emergence of an EU common stance on certain issues. Another group was labeled "Strategic Partners", which includes states preferring to build "special" relationships with Moscow that had the potential to undermine EU's common policies. "Friendly Pragmatists" were named those EU members who tended to value their national business interests higher than the common EU policy goals; while "Frosty Pragmatists" were the countries which even though likewise tended to focus on business, they were also vociferous about Moscow's questionable behavior on human rights and other areas. Finally, the "New Cold Warriors" were considered by the report to include those EU-members that had clear hostile relationships with Russia and were inclined to use their veto to impede European Union's negotiations with Russian Federation.³⁴

³² Ivan Krastev, "Democracy's 'Doubles'," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 17, no. 2, April 2006, pp. 53-54

³³ Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, "A Power Audit on EU-Russia Relations," *ECFR Policy Paper*, November 2007, http://ecfr.3cdn.net/456050fa3e8ce10341_9zm6i2293.pdf

³⁴ Ibid., p.2

Facing the criticism and pressure from certain Western partners, and constrained by the very skillful foreign policy of Russia, Moldovan Communist Government is looking for solutions paying attention on what is going on in other post-Soviet states. Most of these countries are ruled by authoritarian governments, which are using elections only as a tool for legitimizing their continuous stay in power. In few cases, like those of Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, the West can only criticize and condemn this trend, without being able to act, given the protection that Moscow has extended to these countries and which includes also some material support. In the cases of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan international organizations and Western countries are softer in their criticism, despite electoral violations and clear lack of democratic progress in these two states. It is important to bring up the fact that the last two, unlike Moldova, are to a great extent financially independent. The critics condemning the West for their stance on Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan insist the reason behind such a “favorable nation” treatment is explained by Western pragmatic interests and the struggle for energy access between East and West.

Georgia is a very recent example of how ambiguous might be the assessment given by the West to democratic transition processes in post-Soviet states. Initially the ODIHR/OSCE election monitoring mission gave a positive assessment to the presidential elections in this country, although mentioning some violations, but insisting that overall elections met the international standards for democratic elections.³⁵ Then, few days later, a German diplomat Dieter Boden, well known in Moldova since last summer when he headed the ODIHR election observation mission, stated in an interview to the German newspaper “Frankfurter Rundschau” that in Georgia “there was crass, negligent and deliberate falsification during the vote counting”. Even though he insisted that observers had access to this information only at a later stage,³⁶ critics claimed that it was the pressure of the Georgian opposition protests that caused this change in opinion. It seems that the West does have a selective way of treating the post-Soviet states that somehow embodies double standards.

Therefore, in the case when Communist incumbent party in Moldova expected the West to turn a blind eye on their undemocratic practices in exchange for being openly critical of Russian policy towards Transnistrian conflict, the PCRM reasoning behind these expectations were not completely without sense. It is another story that the PCRM was not able to make a difference between their case and the cases of other post-Soviet countries mentioned earlier in the text, based on the way they were treated by the West. However, there is a certain degree of fault on the side of EU partners, expressed by the particularities of the political communication culture practiced by EU members. In many instances the Communist government perceives their exaggeratedly softened messages as a tacit approval of its policies and actions. Also, this almost fanatical obsession of Europeans to be “politically correct” is

³⁵ ODIHR/OSCE Press release, “Georgian Election in Essence Consistent with Most Commitments but Challenges Must be Addressed Urgently,” 6 January 2008, <http://www.osce.org/item/29183.html>

³⁶ Deutsche Welle, “Charge of Fraud Surface in Georgian Elections,” 10 January 2008, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,3049934,00.html>

understood by large masses in Moldova as a sign of EU's support and encouragement of Communist government policies. A very telling example is a recent declaration by Paolo Berizzi, the head of political and economic section of the European Commission Delegation to Moldova. He insisted that Moldova has registered successes in EUMAP implementation,³⁷ only to mention a few moments later the existence of a number of deficiencies,³⁸ whose existence in the eyes of many experts in fact were indicative of the Plan's failure. Of course, one should not ignore the very negative role played by those local mass-media outlets loyal to the Communist governance, which tend to present in their news only the positive segments of the events, while avoiding making public the critical ones.

Summing up, being dependent on these two centers of political power, Moldovan Government cannot escape their pressures and influence. EU, however, is not capable of protecting Moldova from Russian attacks and neither it is able to recompense the losses resulted from a deterioration of relations with Russia. As well, despite an active involvement lately in the Transnistrian conflict resolution process the EU did not manage to be especially efficient in this regard. Not at least in the perception of PCRM leaders, also to their big disappointment, since they hoped EU will be able to offset the current Russia's hegemonic role in the existing negotiations format. It was indirectly revealed in the last declarations of president Voronin, who suddenly replaced his usual harsh rhetoric towards Moscow with a more appeasing one, beginning to stress the very important role that Russia plays in this conflict resolution process.

Pushing further the balance in its favor, Moscow has showed convincing signs that is ready to compensate the financial assistance that Communist Government is getting from EU, if it reaches an agreement with Moldova on the issues of interest to Russia. And the key interests of Russia is keeping Moldova out of European institutions, maintaining a government which will follow Russia's lead in its foreign policies towards the West, and preserving or even increasing Russian military presence in Moldova. Using the carrot and stick approach Moscow employs pressure mechanisms in various forms. In their private talks with Moldovan officials, Russian diplomats are directly enquiring why Moldova is so eager to join EU, when Europe does not want Moldova in. And Communists, facing the risk of losing their dominant position in domestic politics, also because of possible severe repercussions on national economy as a result of the Russian trade sanctions, seem to be willing to adapt their positions and strategies as Moscow wishes.

There is a sufficient number of influential members in the PCRM with a Soviet-style background and mindset, who are tempted to lean towards a policy of rapprochement with Russia. They claim this policy option should be

³⁷ Deca-Press News Agency, "Paolo Berizzi: Moldova Has Registered Success in the Implementation of the European Union – Moldova Action Plan.", [Paolo Berizzi: Moldova a inregistrat succese in implementarea Planului de Actiuni Republica Moldova-Uniunea Europeana], 11 January 2008, http://www.deca.md/?cat=info_europa&id=110

³⁸ Infotag News Agency, "Paolo Berizzi Noted Moldova is Successful in Implementing the EU-Moldova Action Plan," [Паоло Берizzi отмечает успехи Молдовы во внедрении плана действий РМ-ЕС], 11 January 2008, <http://www.azi.md/news?ID=47666>

followed in order to receive in exchange the Kremlin's agreement for the reintegration of Moldova, and the assistance of Moscow for PCRM to continuously stay in power. Therefore, one should perceive the deliberately created obstacles in the way of the EUMAP implementation as a new top sanctioned policy supporting the drift towards Russian Federation. It aims at intentionally failing the build up of necessary prerequisites for Moldova to be able to join EU institutionally. In a way it is a thoroughly planned subversive course of actions orchestrated by segments of Moldovan leadership and aimed at sabotaging the EU integration policies.

Such actions are neither obvious nor easy to expose. Chisinau is willing to continue receiving various benefits that EU can offer, but without jeopardizing the existing mechanisms that the Communist incumbent party has built during the last seven years to favor them and to allow an unrestricted control of political power. So, the Moldovan leadership is working on advancing its relations with EU, trying to benefit from the logic that a government, which has got the support of Brussels is not an autocratic one. And it very much cherishes the formula "everything but the institutional integration" very popular among influential EU policy circles, because this is possibly the only subtle way that a post-Soviet autocratic type of political system can be preserved in Moldova. This current state of affairs and the existing trends allow PCRM not only to avoid hard EU pressure to promote real democratic transition, but also to consequently escape the conditionality of the Western assistance. At the end, EU is gifting the necessary political and financial support to Voronin, not requesting anything in exchange and even stressing they do not want Moldova joining EU institutions.

The new strategy launched inside EU and embraced by Communists suggests that Moldova may obtain "the four EU freedoms", as are the free movements of people, goods, services and money.³⁹ Being offered these preferences without institutional integration into EU will allow the Communists to avoid a transformation of the Moldovan political system, while still enjoying the benefits of these EU preferences. Which are very important to them, because they will assist the efforts of PCRM to efficiently reduce the social tensions and even to increase its own popularity among Moldovan population. If played accordingly it may even bring Communists an aura of a national hero, releasing them of the necessity to liberalize the political system.

One should not get confused by the very insistent requests of the Moldovan Communist leadership to receive a clear EU membership perspective. Influential politicians in Chisinau perfectly understand they cannot be granted such a perspective, and forced their request just for the sake of public show, presenting themselves as pro-Europeans. They also obtained a good argument for their arsenal of manipulative techniques. It will allow them to claim if pressure mounts on their government, that EU rejected Moldova numerous times, not considering our country worth enough to be a member of the Club.

³⁹ Novosti-Moldova News Agency, "Moldova and EU have to develop a new document on the principles of further cooperation," [Молдова и ЕС должны выработать новый документ о принципах дальнейшего сотрудничества], 11 January 2008, http://www.newsmoldova.ru/news.html?nws_id=670476&date=2008-01-11

This may be used when Chisinau will decide to obviously change its foreign policy intending to join any Russian-led initiative.

A fake implementation

The European integration idea is very popular in Moldova, and is well comprehended by a significant percentage of the total population. Add to it the uneasiness of the Communists to lose the financial support offered by the EU for promoting reforms and economic stability, and one can understand why PCRM leadership cannot openly distance itself from the goal of EU integration. On the other hand, as argued before in the text, a genuine implementation of the EUMAP provisions will result in the creation of a more competitive political environment, offering equal chances for political players and as a consequence shattering PCRM's own positions. In this case PCRM decided to resort to Soviet-style practices and simulate the implementation of the key provisions of the Action Plan and generally of the democratic reforms. The trend has become so obvious that is already recognized and acknowledged by some Western analysts.⁴⁰

When the term of the Plan came to the end, a negative assessment of way the Plan was implemented in Moldova was vehemently rejected by Moldovan officials. Even though President Voronin, as claimed by Kalman Mizsei,⁴¹ acknowledged the existence of deficiencies in the process of carrying out the Action Plan, the Moldovan leadership does not publicly admit this. To the contrary, there were denying statements issued recently, first by Andrei Stratan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI), and later by his subordinates.

They insisted that Moldova has fully implemented the EUMAP, while the areas labeled by the opposition and independent observers as having serious deficiencies are in fact perfectly satisfactory. They explained their point of view by claiming that these contested areas are in fact very vaguely addressed in the Plan, which makes impossible to measure and quantify the degree of success, and therefore it leaves a large room for various interpretations by the ill-wishers of the current administration.

Veaceslav Dobândă, the head of the European Integration Department at the Moldovan MFAEI supported this position, endorsing it during a meeting of the "European Reporter" network on 11 January. He insisted on the idea that what really matters for the Moldovan European integration efforts is to create the necessary legal framework.⁴² Given the widespread critique that the

⁴⁰ Nicu Popescu and Gheorghe Dura, "Nations in Transit 2007 – Moldova," *Freedom House*, p. 476, http://www.freedomhouse.hu/images/fdh_galleries/NIT2007final/nit-moldova-web.pdf

⁴¹ BASA-Press News Agency, "Interview with Kalman Mizsei," 11 January 2008. Among these deficiencies are the judicial reform (the need to have a judiciary independent from the influence of political forces), freedom of media, and business climate (especially the lack a rule of law environment for the business).

⁴² Info-Prim Neo News Agency, "Moldova's accession into the EU depends on two factors, experts insist," 11 January 2008, <http://info-prim.md/?x=22&y=12476>

enacted EU-integration legal framework is intentionally not being enforced by the authorities, Dobândă's statement implies in a way that he does not consider it to be important that this legal framework should function properly. Not at least for the time being. It is exactly this kind of approach, when the authorities draft and enact laws, but then deliberately do not implement them, that is assessed by the expert community as an authorities' attempt to only feign reforms. Having done this, the Moldovan leadership then claims it has fulfilled its obligations.

Even though the argument that those EUMAP areas labeled deficient are so because "they cannot be quantified" may convince a large part of the Moldovan domestic audience, it is hard to believe that the Western audience will buy it. Can EU officials accept with a blunt face the explanation of Moldovan authorities that because the development of democratic institutions cannot be quantified, they consider it a task impossible to carry out?

There are numerous reputable organizations that monitor the democratic transition around the world. And the Action Plan cannot be considered a success story as long as organizations like the Economist Intelligence Unit is assessing Moldova's democratic performance in its 2007 Democracy Index giving it the label of a "flawed democracy", which lags behind countries like Sri-Lanka, Namibia, Papua New-Guinea and Surinam. And, not surprisingly, the lowest scores Moldova has registered fall in the "functioning of government" category.⁴³ The Moldovan leadership seems to discount the fact that many organizations in the West that focus on the area of democratic transition have developed enough analytic tools to credibly assess the democratic process in a political system for researchers and policymakers alike.

There is also another important point to make at this stage⁴⁴. It is only the category of "Electoral process and pluralism" where Moldova has scored a very high mark, which has skewed its overall score. This was possible due to the fact that the existing analytic tools cannot yet grasp with the increasing use of manipulative techniques used by incumbent parties during elections - a trend very much widespread in the post-Soviet space. Such things as the use of administrative resources, the intimidation of voters and political actors are less taken into account during election observation because it is difficult to credibly assess the claims and to quantify their impact on the final voting results. If apart from quantitative analysis the EIU was able to pay more attention to the qualitative analysis of specific cases, then Moldova without doubt would have dropped down a number of points into the "hybrid regimes" group of countries. The data necessary for such a qualitative analysis is available in the ODIHR/OSCE final reports on elections. They are published some two weeks after the elections and usually carry enough documented empiric evidence of election-related violations.

⁴³ The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2007, http://www.economist.com/media/pdf/DEMOCRACY_INDEX_2007_v3.pdf.

⁴⁴ This paragraph was added to the English version of the paper – it was not included in the Romanian version.

Also EIU did not consider making a difference between authoritarian and totalitarian countries, which may be a bit misleading to the public not aware of the methodology involved and goals of the EIU paper. One can assume that if such difference was made, then many countries from the “hybrid regimes” group would have shifted into the group of “authoritarian regimes”. Moldova, then, considering it was over graded on electoral process, could have possibly dropped into the group of authoritarian countries.

Besides, we can examine Moldova’s performance in the area of democratic institutions development during the EUMAP term, looking from a comparative perspective at the period starting from 2005 until the end of 2007. The following data will no doubt show how Moldova registered certain modest progress in all areas, mainly at the beginning of the EUMAP period. And these are only explained by the fact that the Parliament enacted the necessary legislation when the Plan started. Afterwards, as data in table no.1 shows, the government and public administration authorities did not register any tangible progress during 2005-2007. The conclusion that can be drawn from both interpreting the data and from the monitoring and observation of the government’s progress over the Action Plan, is that basically the only thing it has done during three years was to enact the laws.

Area	2004	2005	2006	2007
National Democratic Governance	-	5.75	5.75	5.75
Electoral Process	4.0	4.0	3.75	3.75
Civil Society	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.75
Independent Media	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.25
Local Democratic Governance	-	5.75	5.75	5.75
Judicial Framework and Independence	-	4.75	4.5	4.5
Corruption	6.25	6.25	6.0	6.0
Democracy Score	-	5.07	4.96	4.96

Table no.1 Nations in Transit Ratings and Average Scores⁴⁵

The indexes describing the electoral process, judicial independence and corruption have shown some improvement only at the beginning of the EUMAP period. This is also due to the formal enactment of laws, meant to adjust national legal framework in line with the European standards. There was registered a limited progress in the area of civil society, comparing to the

⁴⁵ The data was taken from the Freedom House reports. The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represents the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=17&year=2006>

previous years, which is explained by the reaction of the evaluators to the declared promises of the Moldovan government to start cooperating with the civil society. This promise was never fulfilled. However, media freedom sector has registered negative dynamics during last year. To summarize, there was a clear stagnation of democratic development in Moldova during 2005-2007 period, with obvious regress in the area of media freedom.

In order to receive a better picture on the media freedom situation in Moldova, the paper makes reference to the assessment carried out by the Reporters Without Borders. Table no.2 shows a clear improvement of the media freedom situation in Moldova by the year 2005. This trend is reversed afterwards, as we can see an ongoing regression which persists until present time. It is useful to note, for comparison, that Moldova scored here worse than Congo, Central African Republic, United Arab Emirates, Senegal, Albania, East Timor and Liberia.

Year	Score	Trend
2003	27	↑
2004	20.50	↑
2005	17.50	↑
2006	19.17	↓
2007	24.75	↓

Table no. 2 Annual Press Freedom Indexes⁴⁶

Now let us look at another area targeted by EUMAP, namely at the corruption status over the last few years, using the corruption perception index developed by Transparency International. Table no.3 shows clearly that during 2005-2006 the corruption level in Moldova slowly decreased. This positive tendency was halted in 2007, reversing then into a growth of corruption in Moldova. According to the data provided by Transparency International Moldova has a higher level of corruption than Egypt, Djibouti, Burkina Faso, Belize, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, and Swaziland.

⁴⁶ Lower indexes reflect a better situation of the press freedom, and higher indexes point to the regress in the freedom of press conditions, http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=24025. The upward-arrow in the table shows a positive change of situation, with the downward-arrow reflecting the negative trend in the freedom of press situation.

Year	Score	Confidence	Trend
2003	2.4	1.6-3.6	-
2004	2.3	2.0-2.8	↓
2005	2.9	2.3-3.7	↑
2006	3.2	2.7-3.8	↑
2007	2.8	2.5-3.3	↓

Table no. 3 Corruption Perception Indexes, TI⁴⁷

The analysis of these efforts to quantify democratic transition process in Moldova revealed that during the period of 2005-2007, when the Communist incumbent party has taken the responsibility to implement the EU-Moldova Action Plan, very few progress was registered in promoting democratic transition and developing democratic institutions. The body of laws enacted by the current Moldovan leadership, which were meant to promote positive change in these areas, was not enforced by the Government. An external observer should not be misled, but instead should look into it, noting the fact that the process of implementing the EUMAP is simulated, not aiming at reaching the strategic goals of the Plans' policies, and distorting the rule of law and pluralism principles.

The reason behind this is that the PCRM, having been in power in Moldova during the last seven years, attained a complete control over all branches of state power, intentionally misusing government's resources for promoting its own priorities. The incumbent party feels invulnerable to any opposition pressure, forging conflict by ignoring the opinions of other representative political forces in the area of government personnel, domestic and foreign policies. Consequently, the lack of any progress in implementing the Plan is mainly a responsibility of the PCRM, because it monopolized all the state's law enforcement tools, fully controlling the ways and the instances they are applied. Such a conclusion reveals nothing conceptually new and barely contributes anything of a viable solution to the problem. Namely, the problem is the stagnation of democratic institutions development in Moldova. However, the reasons behind it, identified earlier in the text, are the ones that contributed to the failure of the Action Plan. And addressing them may bring us closer to the solution of the problem.

⁴⁷ Transparency International published these indexes based on the perceptions on the degree of corruption as perceived by business people and country analysts. They range between 0 (highly corrupt) and 10 (highly clean), http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi. The upward-arrow in the table represents the positive change, while the downward-arrow shows the negative change in the corruption level by year.

The disconnect between means and conditions on the ground

Given the political constraints that the PCRM continues to face, including the Russia's resistance to Moldovan aspirations for European integration, it is quite obvious that the same obstacles would be facing any of the political forces existing in Moldova, making them equally vulnerable to them. Thus, it is not just because of the economic and commercial dependence on Russia and the capacity of the former to undermine the support of UE members for a possible Moldova's membership. Most of the influential politicians in Moldova have a Soviet background, their political careers are descendant from the Soviet times, and they obviously are hunt by vulnerabilities coming from their Soviet past.

Russia, having replaced the Soviet Union, has also inherited among others the secrets of the faded empire, including its dirtiest ones. It is not a simple coincidence that most of the former Warsaw Pact countries have put significant effort into getting rid of many of the government employees trained and professionally formed during the Soviet period. Before joining the Euro-Atlantic structures they carried out various forms of lustration procedures, especially targeting the cadre of the government agencies specialized in defense and national security. Therefore the failure of the PCRM as a governing party to carry out the Plan is partially also explained by the political system that Moldovan Communists have built, plagued by the individual vulnerabilities to foreign pressure of their members, deriving from their Soviet past.

The Soviet heritage feature mentioned earlier is not the most dangerous one. A bigger menace that corrodes Moldova's ability to advance on its democratic transition path is represented by the nature of its population, shaped in the hearth of the Soviet totalitarianism. Characterized by a poor political culture, civic apathy, indifference, and submissiveness, such a population undermines and decreases Moldova's ability to avoid the trap of authoritarianism, and even to survive as a sovereign and independent state. At the end, it is a country's population that represents the litmus test of the quality of political elites. This is not only because the population provides the recruitment ground for elites and the environment where it breeds. Demand creates supply, and if the population does not hold the political elites to high standards, then it is the incompetent people, venturers and crooks who end up governing the country. In fact, especially during the transition period, the political class should be sophisticated and competent, because often times it has to deal with tasks of tremendous difficulty, like nation building. They usually have to craft a new national identity of an inclusive nature, which is accepted by the whole population, while not leaving the minorities to feel isolated and discriminated.

Throughout history in many countries and societies it was their leaders who had the role to define and shape the socio-political processes, through this determining the destiny of their nations.⁴⁸ Then, if a problem that Moldova

⁴⁸ Murad Tangiev, "Political Leadership and Transitional Democracy in the Russian Federation: Challenges and Prospects," *Journal of Peace Conflict & Development*, 11 November 2007, p.3, <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>

faces is defined by the nature of its population, another one is dictated by the quality of its political leadership. This chicken-or-egg type of problem created confusion among development aid organizations, since they tended to pay more attention to elites at the expense of disregarding the need to inform, educate and transform the public also.

Actually, the great majority of the assistance that Moldova has received so far to facilitate its post-Soviet transition process towards a functional democracy had a top-to-bottom approach, meaning it mainly targeted the institutions, and as a result the political leadership. Such an approach to Moldova's problems chosen by its Western partners implies in our view a methodological error. Even though this may look at the first glance as an overstatement, and even exaggeration, it still carries a high degree of truth in it. Given the very weak link between the elites and the population, marked by the exclusion of the masses from any vital political process of the society, the obsession of the development agencies to work mainly with the government has strengthened this tendency. The latter did not avail themselves of the opportunity to increase the awareness and involvement of the Soviet-style educated masses, in the public life of their country. In the conditions when the elites were not interested in promoting democratic transition changes, and the politically apathetic population did not allow for the civil society to become a strong actor, there was no leverage in the society to press the elites into genuinely promoting democratic reforms.

This suggests that Moldova's Western partners (governments, NGOs, international organizations and various initiatives and funds) also brought their contribution to the lack of success of the Action Plan. In most cases their efforts to assist Moldova's political-economic development have excluded from the transition development process the population, while paying exaggerated attention to the institutions and political leadership. Thus the most important participant of the political process was neglected. And Soviet-era logic was applied, carrying that the government is the one who should generate change and drive social and political progress. It all was based on the faulted assumption that the elites were willing to promote changes, while in fact they became interested in preserving the status quo. Another possible incentive for this kind of approach could have also been the idea that the population will easily accept democratic changes, since those were "for good". However it did not consider the specific political culture of the population in post-Soviet countries, and the fact that in order to understand democratic values and accept them, the masses needed to be informed and their mindset changed.

In conclusion it is possible to claim that the logic behind the actions of the Western development aid organizations required a number of conditions, such as an elite, genuinely willing changes to be brought into the system, and the existence of a bottom-up pressure on political leadership applied by an intelligent and socially active citizenry, which is understanding the need for change. And this was not the case in Moldova. The political class was not eager to develop democratic institutions, because it would have affected their personal and group interests. Since the population did not take active part in

the democratization efforts this transition process was reduced to a bilateral business taking place only between the foreign partners and the local political class. Looking for historical analogy, it is possible to realize that the formula “for the people but without people” rarely worked, as the Russian Dekabrists, at their time, found it out the hard way. As such, the Action Plan continued the already established tradition in Moldova, subsequently becoming just another Western project sacrificed on the altar of political formalism, a powerful trend in the Moldovan institutional culture.⁴⁹ And it also failed to consider and address the factor of an insufficiently informed population, which it could have mobilized and encourage to exercise its control function over the government.

This population is conducive to the political formalism practiced and favored by the political elite, because it readily accepts fake success-stories, which obviously lack any substance behind them. If it was better informed and as a result able to understand the political process, then the population would have promptly questioned and challenged the elite. On the top of it, the political system created in Moldova encourages abuses of authority among political class, which was acknowledged by EU officials.⁵⁰ As a conclusion, the need for reviewing the approach to democratic development in Moldova by the Western agencies, or at least to seriously consider the issues addressed before in the text, is self-suggesting.

Promoting a higher involvement of an active and well-informed population in the domestic political process was suggested by Cristoph Zoepel, the former German deputy minister of foreign affairs. He placed a strong emphasis on the value of actively involving the youth and the civil society as separate actors in the dialog over the Action Plan with EU.⁵¹

Also, we should not discard the fact, overused by the current Moldovan leadership, that the PCRM is the first communist party in Europe which came into power through democratic elections. The question that one should ask in response is what would be the distinctive features of a population that massively voted for a non-reformist communist party less than ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union? The existing scholarly literature on post-Soviet area reached certain conclusions that are also valid for Moldova. By and large its population does not fully comprehend such concepts as the lure of law, freedom of press, transparency of the political process, the free and fair elections and therefore it neither understands their importance. This explains the lack of trust in the democratic ideals and the lack of criticism for the totalitarian past of the Soviet Union.⁵²

⁴⁹ ”The Draft Concept of National Security: A Decisive Test for the Moldovan Political Elite”, *Discussion Paper no.1*, IDIS “Viitorul”, August 2007, p. 15, http://www.viitorul.org/public/913/ro/Discussion_Paper_IDIS_14septembrie.pdf

⁵⁰ Europa.md Web-Portal, “Interview with Marianne Mikko: You Need More Initiative, Strategic Thinking and Determination,” 11 November 2007, <http://www.europa.md/rom/info/2503>. Referring to the Moldovan president in the interview Marianne Mikko, the Head of the European Parliament's Commission on Cooperation with the Republic of Moldova said: “the president acts like a monarch”.

⁵¹ Europa.md Web-Portal, “Interview with Dr. Cristoph Zoepel,” 11 December 2007, <http://www.europa.md/rom/info/2692>

⁵² Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber, „Soviet Nostalgia: An Impediment to Russian Democratization,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2005-2006, 29:1, pp. 83-96

All of this is suggesting that the population with a political culture like the one we witness in Moldova will tend to accept authoritarian governance and will exercise political inertness when its freedom and rights are violated. Moldovan case does provide a volume of evidence in this regard, including the lack of response to the government's actions aimed at intimidating the opposition. Even a more telling example is the recent case when as a result of the power struggle between the incumbent PCRM and the Chisinau City Hall, controlled by the opposition, the capital city was left without hot water during a whole winter week, with no reaction from its inhabitants.

Looking for solutions

It is time to review and emphasize the issues which led to the EUMAP failure, as identified previously in the text:

1. The lack of a genuine interest of the current leadership in promoting the democratic reforms, as was set out in the Action Plan; because it would result in offsetting the power and relations structure erected by the PCRM over the last seven years. Effectively following the Plan will jeopardize the interests of the powerful groups associated with the Communists. The nature of the hegemonic influence acquired by the PCRM threatens the viability of the constitutional regime and its pluralist character, and represents a major obstacle for adopting domestic practices in line with international norms and practices.
2. The vehement resistance of the Russian Federation to the Moldovan plan of European integration and the pressures targeted not only on Chişinău, but also on few EU members. It has as a goal the slowing down or completely excluding any Moldova's perspective to join EU.
3. The exclusive dependence of the West on the current Moldovan leadership for the implementation of the Action Plan, while largely neglecting the organized social groups and disregarding the very poor level of democratic culture of Moldovan people. This in turn undermines the ability of the latter to fulfill its key role of the control and pressure mechanism on the government.
4. The dominance of a vetust, Soviet-era mentality, which prevents citizens from becoming more open-minded to democratic ideals like the rule of law, freedom of press, transparency of the political process, and free and fair elections. This in turn affects the ability of the population to fully understand and identify with the democratic values, leading to their exclusion from the participation in the political life of their country and preventing them from becoming an agent of change in the process of democratic transition.

It was mentioned that one of the driving forces behind this study came from the conference on the role of the Visegrad countries in the European Neighborhood Policy, held last December in Budapest. The reason for this repeated reminder lies in the conviction that Visegrad Group represents a framework which carries a significant potential to assist Moldova in its

European integration endeavor. International funds and organizations specialized in democratic development and present in Moldova are able to produce only limited results in the case of the last two problems listed at the beginning of this chapter.

First of all, it is so because their strategy models were drafted based on the transition experience in other regions of the world. And their courses of action with the domestic partners followed a general mechanism, which was not tailored to the post-Soviet country realities of Moldova. Given the consolidated institutional framework of the Western development agencies it is only obvious that there will be an opposition inside organizations regarding any possible changes or alterations of their current strategies. New change brings the necessity of training personnel or even hiring new employees, the need to adjust the organizational structure. It also increases the risk of failures and brings the resulting criticism until new efficient models and strategies are created, tested and established. Such organizations also have a need to quickly succeed and bring results, in order to collect “success stories” for their portfolios. They are rarely successful or willing to address problems of the type described in the bullets number three and four at the beginning of this chapter, since these require a long-term involvement while the results are difficult to quantify and not visible soon.

The Visegrad Group countries are less concerned about this kind of issues that the specialized organizations are facing, and their interest towards Moldova is of a different nature. Visegrad countries (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia), alike Moldova, had the unfortunate experience of Soviet occupation, which makes them better equipped than the countries from the Western Europe to penetrate the intricacies of the problems Moldova is dealing with today. Then, these four countries are in a way the natural allies of Moldova, since they understand the difficulties that arise in relations with Russian Federation, sympathizing with us. In its turn, Moldova can benefit very much from the fresh experience of these countries transition from a totalitarian system of government to a democratic one with market economy. Another interesting subject for Moldova is the experience of the Visegrad Group acquired during their accession into the Euro-Atlantic structures, and especially into the European Union.

After joining the EU, these countries have formed the new Eastern border line of the European Union. They are the European Union’s “experts” on the Eastern European countries, and started to provide advice to EU’s institutions. Besides that, the region which Moldova belongs to falls into the focus of the national foreign policies of the Visegrad countries, also due to the fact that they tend to influence the EU’s policy in the area.

Obviously we should not fall trap to a superficial treatment of this subject, since the foreign policies of the Visegrad Group members in the region vary from case to case. They maintained relationship of different intensity with Russia, which is also a very influential and very active player in the region. The different perceptions regarding their own national interests represent another factor that guides the foreign policies of the Visegrad countries.

Getting back to the European Council on Foreign Relations study on EU-Russia relations, we should not disregard the classification it gave to countries of the Visegrad Group. Hungary and Slovakia were assessed as “Friendly Pragmatists” in their relations with Russia; the Czech Republic received the label of a “Frosty Pragmatist”, while Poland is considered in the ECFR study as a “New Cold Warrior”.

Actually, Moldova seems to have built the most intense relations with Hungary, which has offered to host the Common Visa Center. Then, maybe just by coincidence, a Hungarian diplomat was appointed as the EU’s Special Representative for Moldova, while a Hungarian general is heading the EU Border Assistance Mission, established on the border between Moldova and Ukraine, on the Transnistria region sector. There are of course also certain projects among various civil society organizations of Moldova, Poland and Czech Republic, but those have a rather chaotic character, not being guided by long-term goals, in order to be considered endeavors of strategic value.

It is extremely important that all four Visegrad countries expressed in a way or another support of Moldova’s intention to join EU. As it concerns specific areas and projects of cooperation there is a need to thoroughly study the experience, the interests and the limitations that may exist in the particular cases of these four. Slovakia, just to mention one, is the country of origin for one of the well known European media NGO “Memo-98”, which has already acquired some experience in Moldova, monitoring the work of domestic media in the general local elections last summer.

Conclusions⁵³

The Action Plan has failed because it was entrusted to the national political elite which needed the public resonance of the project both for domestic and international audience, but less cared about its resulting impact. However banal it may sound, the EUMAP lacked a mechanism of oversight and control over the project and a feedback element was not included in it. The European founders of the project assumed when dealing with Chisinau that Moldova was similar to the Central European countries when those started to work their way into EU. Brussels did not consider that Moldova, alike the most post-Soviet systems, is a one-man’s country, because it is ruled by a one-man’s party. This type of societies is unpredictable, because it lacks the institutional checks and balances. To appropriately address this issue one should look into the available means and tools and identify what else in Moldova could serve as a balance mechanism. In the Republic of Moldova this role can be played by its civil society groups, which even though are still underdeveloped and weak, they seem to represent the strongest existing leverage.

⁵³ The content of this chapter was modified and completed in the English version of the paper, considering the received feedback

Why civil society groups? Because, except for political parties, they are the only organized and qualified force, relatively independent, that can act as an effective counterbalance to the government, helping to prevent abuses of power. On the other side political parties lack the mobilization drive, both because of the Soviet-style political culture of the masses, and because the parties in Moldova are structures that revolve around the interests of a single person or a small group. Civil society is also more inclined to use soft tools, having learned to avoid confrontation with the government, while working on promoting their goals. Often time civil society groups have also more expertise, technical skills and even resources, they look more credible and are eligible for foreign aid and support.

And if one aims to be solution-oriented, one will use the tools that are available, while continue to develop others, more effective ones. Civil society should be used as a mechanism of checks and balances in the process of implementing the Action Plan. Since it was not really implemented, the Plan's provisions will be included in another similar document with EU, meaning there still will be work to be done. In parallel with this task, while getting a bigger role in the country, civil society groups will involve people, informing and educating them. Then the population will become more aware of the processes that occur in the society, and understand that it is in their interests to get involved in the domestic political life. One side effect will be that such a process will contribute to the improvement of the quality of elites and political parties.

This paper does not suggest an "illegitimate replacement" of government, as it may seem, since the development of democratic institutions and the promotion of a democratic culture among the population is not, actually, only the task of the government, but of the civil society as well. In fact, in transition political systems, it should be one of the main tasks of the civil society to convince and where possible to constrain the government to proceed with genuine democratic reforms. And, as this study argues, because an authoritarian system is being built in Moldova, the need for a more robust interaction of the civil society with the government is becoming crucial.

To help Moldovan civil society taking this role EU has to contribute to the elevation of the civil society groups profile and create the conditions when the Moldovan leadership will have to cooperate with them. The famous and rarely used today principle of conditionality should be given a new chance. When EU intends to offer certain financial support to Moldova, aimed at the promotion of the Action Plan goals, it should not give all the funds to the government. They will be inefficiently used, as it happened many times before, not targeted towards real needs and problems, while the failure will be concealed again into the political formalism that characterizes Moldovan institutional culture. Instead, EU has to institute a mechanism that would allow qualified and experienced civil society groups, such as NGOs, academic institutions, etc. to compete for funds and participate in tenders with their project proposals. Obviously the tender board should be independent, preferably including members from European institutions and/or countries. The Moldovan leadership should face the condition that if they want the funds,

then they should fully cooperate with the winners of the tenders. The government could receive a partner status in the project, however only as a beneficiary, with no or very little deciding power. Effective feed-back mechanisms should be established, including regular oversight and monitoring of EU partners. There should also be invested necessary efforts in an attempt to quantify to the extent possible the projected results of the Action Plan, without dropping out the qualitative element of this algorithm.

Such an approach is in no way affecting issues like sovereignty, because we are talking about international projects implemented by local operators, after they have won the contract in a competitive and transparent tender. It is also in line with the democratic principles because the government in no way should assume total control over the public policies, especially when due to the low income of governmental employees, they often lack crucial skills for implementing such projects. And since in Moldova the Communist incumbent party has destroyed the institutional balance, taking control over all branches of the state power, the system is prone to misuse and corruption.

It is exactly then when the experience and the specific position of the Visegrad Group countries may become very handy. Since it is unrealistic to believe that Brussels will be able to devote all the human resources needed for the interaction with Moldovan actors and the monitoring of the Action Plan related projects, it can be assisted by civil society groups from the Visegrad countries. They may partner with Moldovan counterparts, either running the project together, or assisting with technical expertise. Their involvement will be very beneficial, since it will serve as an additional incentive for the government to cooperate and will discourage any possible pressure on domestic civil society groups. The Visegrad counterparts will also help Moldovan civil society groups to improve their activities and skills, assist in building effective advocacy campaigns and may serve as an impartial party in case of project related disputes between the domestic civil society groups and the benefiting Moldovan authorities.

Another possible thing may be the creation of a Visegrad+1 forum. Under this umbrella interested actors from Visegrad countries could regularly get together with their Moldovan counterparts representing both the civil society and the government and discuss strategic issues. One of these could be the priority directions for the channeling of efforts and resources in order to effectively target the provisions of the Action Plan. Specific efforts are to be invested into creating a format of discussions that will avoid deadlocks and the trap of being counterproductive.

As a result, instead of having the Moldovan authorities pretending to work on the Action Plan, Moldovan civil society should be involved more intensely, artificially creating checks and balances that are needed in the process of the Plan's implementation. This will create a parallel structure of cooperation between an organized and interested sector of civil society in Moldova on one side and EU institutions and countries on the other side. In the end, it will make the process of EUMAP implementation more transparent, both to the Western partners and Moldovan citizens that are misinformed by the ruling

authorities. Another benefit of this endeavor is that it should make the process of promoting the Action Plan goals more dynamic, bringing a push effect on the government and Moldovan leadership. And third, as a side effect, this will empower the Moldovan civil society, making it more influential and involved in the political life in Moldova. Finally, not only this process of cooperation will lead to an increasing capacity of the Visegrad Group to effectively interact with the Moldovan authorities, and to play a more significant role in other important issues involving even regional security and stability. By improving the capacity of Moldovan civil society groups to lobby inside the EU, this new model of cooperation will significantly contribute to the offsetting of the existing CIS and Russian-centered regionalism trend. Decreasing the strong regionalism links with Russia, altering the existing interdependence connections, and changing this balance towards the European Union - represent another key solution to a successful European integration of Moldova.

The model of empowering civil society in the framework of EUMAP implementation will be a contribution to the certain steps that EU has already taken in this direction. The solutions offered in this paper are only a natural and logical extension to these efforts of the EU. European Union has already shown signs of interest in a bigger involvement of the civil society in its EUMAP related interaction with Moldovan authorities. One example is the EU call addressed to the civil society in Moldova (and other states) to assist the European Union institutions in the assessment of the action plans progress.⁵⁴

Therefore, the main focus areas of a possible “Visegrad+1” cooperation have to include repairing the deficiencies of the EUMAP, attract the Moldovan government into a processes of irreversible democratic transition, promoting transparency in the methods and process of the Action Plan and a more active dialogue with the EU. Importantly, it should also launch a strategic framework that would aim at the longer term goal of informing and educating the Moldovan population to understand and identify themselves with the democratic values and principles; to train and help them get effectively involved in the country’s political and social life.

The proposed model of the Action Plan implementation involving an increased use by the EU of the Moldovan civil society actors is based on the social movement theory, aiming among others at generating collective resources for mobilization in Moldova and creating a network of organizations with the Visegrad countries. It tends to make use of the Smelser’s value-added model of collective behavior,⁵⁵ which identifies six conditions that are necessary for a collective behavior to occur. These include the structural conduciveness, a social structure that may facilitate or constrain the emergence of specific types of collective behavior, the structural strain, growth and spread of generalized belief, precipitating factors, mobilization, and operation of social control. While the use of the suggested tools and models in our particular case look somewhat unusual, they offer not only a more effective framework for the

⁵⁴ Invitation to contribute information to the ENP Progress reports,
http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/consultation/consultation2008_en.pdf

⁵⁵ Neil Smelser, “*Theory of Collective Behavior*,” (New York: The Free Press, 1962)

administration and implementation of the Action Plan. Only by the fact of their existence they will contribute to the promotion of the Plan's envisaged goals.

The recommendations presented in this study suggest a cooperation model that would provide mechanisms and actions to address more effectively the four problems identified in the previous chapter. The European integration process of Moldova is going to be a lengthy one. In order to build up the prerequisites necessary for the Moldova to join EU, there is a need for a novel approach. The paper considers it absolutely necessary that the process of democratic transition in Moldova, as a condition for its European integration, be based on two pillars: an active citizens' involvement in the process of democratic transformation, and the creation of a direct communication channel between Moldovan civil society and the actors of the European Union. By offering a key role in implementing the Action Plan to the civil society actors, while leaving to the government a beneficiary status in the project, we will make the first necessary step in the direction of a genuine democratic transition in Moldova.

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