

# THE EFFECTS OF CHANGING ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN MOLDOVA

**D**iscussions on the need to change the electoral system in the Republic of Moldova have been a constant of political and public discourse since independence until now. Although most of the time these discussions were held on a theory field, now they are animated by practical tools such as legislative initiatives that serve as proof of the seriousness of intentions to change the electoral system.

**I**n the current election cycle, references to the need to change the electoral system have been made several times particularly by the LDPM leader, Vlad Filat, advocating for a mixed electoral system, in which half the deputies would be elected on single-member constituencies and others on party lists. Unlike the LDPM, the DP coalition colleagues, and especially Vlad Plahotniuc support another model - transition to an absolute uninominal electoral system that provides for the election of deputies exclusively in single-member con-

stituencies, with elections in two rounds, if none of the candidates accumulates in the first round 50% + 1 of the vote.

**D**iscussions around the issue of changing the electoral system are mainly related to the question of who benefits another system and what are its advantages?

**F**rom the statements that were made it is clear that neither the DP (at least Vlad Plahotniuc) nor the LDPM are satisfied with the current electoral system, even if they plead for different systems, neither LDPM nor the DP support the current system. In fact, the same debate took place in neighboring countries, Ukraine and Romania, where the electoral systems were changed from the proportional one to the mixed and uninominal majority voting. And if the LDPM or the PD intentions will become reality, then the Republic of Moldova will „adjust” to the regional trend of transition to, at least, a mixed voting system.

**T**he benefits of adopting the uninominal system are greater legitimacy by uninominal vote, greater accountability from those elected, guarantee of better representation of citizen interests in the regions, greater access of citizens to decision making, reduction of corruption within parties and regain of confidence in the legislative institution. However, it seems that each of these advantages has weakne-

esses questioning, at least in the political context in Moldova, the need to change it.

**T**he legitimacy of any legislature is, however, offered by the law, and not as much by the way to choose the composition of the legislature. And as long as the elections were held under the law, we can not talk about greater legitimacy after a single-member vote and a smaller one after a proportional representation election. Both systems provide equal legitimacy, for the election was held according to the law. Moreover, the legitimacy issue should be treated together with the argument of a better representation after elections. This hypothesis is a risky one and has many shortcomings. Just imagine that the Party of Communists has a support, in the district X, of 35%, the remaining parties have a support ranging between 10% and 20%. In this context, the most likely there will be held a second round where will compete the PCRM candidate and a candidate of the current Alliance and after the second round it is likely that the latter will carry the day. And even if the contrary might happen, however, half of voters remain unrepresented. But, it is true, that the uninominal system favors increased representation of other ethnic groups, especially of those who live compactly (Ukrainians in the north and Gagauz in the south).

**H**ere it would be appropriate to say that the representation of regional interests under a uninominal system is very difficult. The multitude of members of parliament with different connections and even without membership in some political forces will create an intra-institutional imbalance that will be manifested by each member intention of promoting micro-projects, which usually should be the responsibility of the local government. Thus, the more likely that a parliament composed after an election with uninominal system will be less operational than the one formed on the basis of a proportional representation

election, and therefore we may be witnesses of trivialization of debates within parliament. In fact, here is one of the most serious threats to the democratic system in Moldova, namely weakening the positions of political parties.

**I**n a democracy that is consolidating as Moldova, the role of political parties is essential, especially by their tendency to represent the interests of certain groups in society, but also by their memory and ability to ensure continuity of political processes and reforms. Political parties in Moldova need to strengthen and institutionalize more so that the most important political processes to be discussed inside. Changing the electoral system into a uninominal one will weaken political parties which will involve a very high degree of their volatility and particularly of their members. The argument that the uninominal voting system would reduce corruption within parties, under the conditions where during elections the places on the list would be bought, is only partially true. Does the very fact that each candidate will be elected in electoral constituencies is a guarantee that corruption will be reduced? Firstly, there is great probability that the same corrupt people who now are running on party lists will run in constituencies, and they are likely to be elected as they are currently voted with the party. And secondly, there is no guarantee that candidates in constituencies will not be financed by the same „oligarchs” and then they will owe to those who sponsored their campaign. Moreover, after changing the electoral system in Ukraine, there are many assumptions in the experts’ environment that this thing was carried out so that after elections, by specific methods of persuasion specific to the post-Soviet area, the Regions Party can obtain a new majority in parliament, by including „the nonaffiliated”. Corruption within political parties must be fought otherwise, because under present conditions it will exist in all types of electoral system. One possibility to reduce corruption on the candidates list of

political parties in parliament is that it is composed by a secret ballot of the party's national council, which after voting will determine the sequence of candidates and ultimately, will provide opportunities for each member to be able to be represented on the list.

**A**n equally important issue that arises in the context of discussions on the electoral system is the Transnistrian region. It is well known that setting the current electoral system (i.e. the creation of a unique single-member constituency) was determined by the desire to create opportunities for citizens in the eastern districts to participate in elections. If a mixed or uninominal electoral system was adopted it should be taken into account that single-member constituencies in the eastern region of Moldova, must be addressed, geographically speaking, in a horizontal, not vertical way, which would allow the inclusion of certain areas not controlled by the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova into single-member constituencies under the jurisdiction of Chisinau.

**I**n any case, one of the arguments that favor the adoption of a uninominal voting system remains Transnistria. The current feeling is that politicians do not wish the inclusion of Transnistria until the reintegration takes place; however, such a step would accelerate the reintegration process. One of the scenarios that may be applied is as follows: two members in each district ( $32 \times 2 = 64$ ), 18 from Chisinau, 8 from Balti and 11 from Transnistria. What is required is that the electoral constituencies to be created to meet the above algorithm.

**I**n fact, the algorithm and setting principles of constituencies under a uninominal system are not quite clear, but this fact is very important. We know that the election results may vary depending on the way the electoral districts were established, a fact demonstrated by several simulations of changing the U.S. electoral constituencies' boundaries, and ul-

timately even if the U.S. system is different, in this case the example remains valid, given that the principle of formation can influence the outcome of the vote.

**I**t seems that each electoral system has its advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, the Republic of Moldova needs an electoral system that prevents erosion of the constituent institutions of democracy, namely the political parties. Undoubtedly we need a democratization of political parties, but certainly there is no need for their disappearance, or for keeping them artificially. At the same time, it is needed a stronger link between voters and those elected. The arguments exposed above, in fact, favor maintaining the current system, or in the latter case, the transition to a mixed electoral system, which will be able both to strengthen the role of political parties and to develop the relationship between citizens and parliament.

**H**owever, any major change in the electoral system must follow certain steps to be widely accepted and supported. In countries with a democratic system and in countries that aspire to such a system, usually the issue of changing the electoral system is subject to extensive debate with the participation of major actors - civil society, political parties, media, national and international experts, international organizations and others. Therefore, the need for broad discussions to ensure a transparent and inclusive process becomes evident.

**A**t the same time, the electoral system change is essentially carried out to the detriment of opposition and the AIE parties will be advantaged by the new system, not to mention the fact that the quality of parliament and its debates could be affected. Nevertheless, the change of the system is rational in order to accelerate the country's reintegration process and to include the representatives from the eastern districts into the political life of the Republic of Moldova.



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**str. Iacob Hîncu 10/1, Chișinău**

**MD-2005 Republica Moldova**

**373 / 22 221844 tel**

**373 / 22 245714 fax**

**office@viitorul.org**

**www.viitorul.org**



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**Tel.: +373 22 885830**

**E-mail: fes@fes.md**

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