



## Moldova's Latest Political Crisis Has Wider Implications

*By Alina Inayeh*

The last couple of days have been extremely tumultuous in Moldova. On Saturday a new government coalition was announced, but on Sunday a court suspended the president and appointed a former prime minister interim president, who has called snap elections that would prevent the new government from taking office. The country is now in constitutional limbo.

Moldova is not new to political deadlock and infighting, and it rarely makes the international news, yet what happened this weekend in this small eastern European country of 3 million has regional and transatlantic implications.

In last February's parliamentary elections, the Socialists, largely regarded as pro-Russia, won 32 percent of the votes and the pro-democratic ACUM bloc almost 27 percent, while the Democratic Party of Vladimir Plahotniuc, the country's powerful oligarch, came in third with 24 percent. Almost three months of negotiations followed, with the three parties unable to decide on a coalition to give the country a new government.

On Saturday, however, ACUM and the Socialists eventually succeeded in forming an otherwise unlikely coalition, united in their goal to rid the country of the influence of Plahotniuc, the man who captured Moldova's institutions and practically controls the state. However, only minutes later the Constitutional Court, which is controlled by Plahotniuc, ruled the new government unconstitutional, and the Democratic Party pushed forward an alternative government. The Constitutional Court also suspended President Igor Dodon over an alleged breach of parliamentary procedure that allowed ACUM and the Socialists time to form their coalition.

What is extraordinary about this weekend's events is that the coalition between ACUM and the Socialists, and the consequent government, is supported by the EU, the United States, and Russia. Their respective ambassadors were present for the session of the parliament, and all have issued communiqués in support of the new government. This is highly unusual for a region where Russia and the transatlantic community compete for influence, and are at odds with each other.



# Transatlantic Take

Russia's cooperation with the United States and the EU in this case should not be mistaken for realignment, or for the beginning of a new partnership. While it is true that Plahotniuc became

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uncomfortable for Russia, given his lately hostile attitude, it employs other, more creative methods to get rid of undesirables than a coalition with the EU and the United States. Russia cooperates now with them over Moldova only to ask for cooperation, or benevolence, elsewhere.

Many also fear Russia will push for a federalization of the country, which would give the Russian-controlled breakaway region of Transnistria veto power over the country's security and geopolitical decisions.

With growing economic and social problems at home, the Kremlin may have a bigger fish to fry than Moldova. With a new EU leadership in the making following the European Parliament elections, a changing political constellation in Germany, and a France that has never been too tough on Russia, anyway, it is very likely that the good gesture is meant to warm relations so that a consequent conversation—whether on lifting sanctions, on the

Middle East, or on Ukraine—meets less resistance. It is very likely that it is also meant to soften Russia's image in the United States as the bad guy on the block and pave the way for a more relaxed conversation on any transaction the two countries have to make. Cooperation in Moldova hands Russia a chip it will eventually use in its interest.

Russia's support for the ACUM-Socialists government also signals to regimes in the region that playing the transatlantic community against Moscow is no longer an option. As real, significant, and troublesome as it is, Russia's meddling in internal politics has often been used by governments in the region as an excuse for their own lack of will to reform. Moldova is no exception. Russia's aggressiveness and use of illegal means to interfere should not be an excuse to corruption or capture of state institutions in Moldova, Ukraine, or Georgia.

In the same vein, the simplistic labeling of parties and politicians in the region as either pro-West or pro-Russia no longer holds true. As ACUM and the Socialists making a coalition deal showed, there are issues that transcend this dichotomy, as they should. This approach has to be further used to advance countries' national interests. In every poll in the last few years, Moldovans indicated corruption and poverty, and not Russia, as their main concern. So do Ukrainians, Georgians, and citizens of every other country in the region.

For all that is unusual about it and the risks that come with it, the ACUM-Socialists coalition in Moldova stands as a fine example of politicians in the region placing the national interest over geopolitical divides. Hopefully, this is a good sign of regional maturity.

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