

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

The Role and Significance
in the Process
of Transformation
of the Countries
of Eastern Europe
and the South Caucasus

EDITED BY
PIOTR BAJOR



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of Transformation of the Countries
of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus**

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PIOTR BAJOR**




Kraków

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Geopolitical Choice of the Republic of Moldova on the Example of Snap Parliamentary Elections (2021)

ABSTRACT: For many years, the key topic of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova has been the geopolitical choice between East and West, integration with either the European Union or the Russian Federation. This is reflected in the confrontation between political parties, and the split of political elites and Moldovan society according to the geopolitical feature.

This study aims at analyzing the geopolitical choice of the Republic of Moldova on the example of snap parliamentary elections on 11 July, 2021. Considering the specifics of the elections, the study is focused on the problem of geopolitical choice on the pre-election platforms of Moldovan electoral competitors. Based on the results of parliamentary elections and sociological inquiries, i.e. polls, the author analyzes the attitude of the Moldovan population towards various geopolitical projects – integration with the EU or the Eurasian Economic Union.

The study showed that the problem of geopolitical choice was not dominant in the parliamentary elections in Moldova (2021). The idea of fighting corruption and reforming justice, which was promoted by the victorious Party of Action and Solidarity and M. Sandu, the country's President, was a priority, determining victory in the elections and uniting different ethnic groups. Moldovan public opinion is evidence of an increase in the number of supporters of integration into the European Union.

KEYWORDS: snap parliamentary elections, overcoming the crisis between the president and the parliament, pre-election platforms of electoral competitors, the problem of geopolitical choice, public opinion

Introduction

For many years, the key topic in the elections in the Republic of Moldova has been the geopolitical choice between East and West, between the EU and Russia. It has a strong and lasting effect on the political processes taking place inside the country and is expressed in the political confrontation and electoral behavior of political parties, as well as in the split of political elites and Moldovan society according to the geopolitical feature.

The aim of this study is to analyze the geopolitical choice of Moldova using the example of snap parliamentary elections held on 11 July, 2021. Before proceeding to the realization of the aim set, one should pay attention to two important points. First and foremost, according to its Constitution, Moldova is a parliamentary republic. Although the country returned to general presidential elections in 2016, the powers of the head of the state are limited, and the president can fully influence a situation only with the support of the parliament and the government. Therefore, parliamentary elections are a significant event that determines who will have real power in the country.

Secondly, in the three decades of independence a multi-party system has developed in the Republic of Moldova. There are 53 registered political parties in Moldova,¹ which carry out their activities in accordance with the Law on Political Parties.² However, in actual fact, there are not more than 10 active political parties in the political arena.

¹ *Lista partidelor politice din Republica Moldova*. At: <http://www.asp.gov.md/ro/node/3664>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

² "Lege No. 294-XVI din 21-12-2007 privind partidele politice", *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 42-44, February 29, 2008.

Despite the names and the promoted ideologies of the political parties, the struggle between them is reduced to the struggle of two opposing collective types of memory associated with communist (Soviet) and Romanian identity. The representatives of the parties on the left believe that their opponents in the parties on the right are under the influence of Western values and the process of Europeanization, while, according to the representatives of the right-wing parties, the left is subject to the influence of the East and Eurasian integration processes. Therefore, the main confrontation in the parliamentary and presidential elections has given birth to pro-European and pro-Russian forces.

Specification and results of elections

1. The parliamentary elections on 11 July, 2021 were snap. The parliament of the convocation of 2019 had been functioning for slightly more than two years when it was dissolved by M. Sandu, the president of the country, on 28 April, 2021. The Constitutional Court recognized the constitutional grounds for the dissolution of parliament, and it canceled the state of emergency declared by the parliament, paving the way for snap elections. The key question of the elections was whether the head of the state would be able to strengthen his or her position in the new parliament, overcoming the crisis between the president and the parliament.

2. The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova is made up of 101 deputies. Following the parliamentary elections of 2019, which were held by means of a mixed electoral system, there was a return to a proportional electoral system, electoral thresholds for parties and blocs were lowered, and the 40 percent gender quota, first introduced in the parliamentary elections (2019), was strengthened by the requirement to be included on the list of candidates. 46% of registered candidates were women, with only three parties headed by them.³ Also, amendments were made related to the financing of the election campaign, and the condition of the pre-election silence returned.

3. The parliament, elected in 2019, was made up of three political parties and a bloc: the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, the ACUM bloc (including the Party of Action and Solidarity and the Dignity and Truth Platform Party), the Democratic Party of Moldova and the Șor Party. The composition of the parliament

³ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Moldova, Early Parliamentary Elections, 11 July 2021: Interim Report. 03 June – 17 June, 2021*. At: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/e/490586.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

was constantly criticized, as a number of deputies were involved in corruption scandals. In addition, its configuration was continuously changing: ‘the term “political tourism”, widespread in Moldova, is associated with the transfer of deputies from one faction to another, not out of conviction but for the gain of material rewards.’⁴ One of M. Sandu’s pre-election promises in the presidential elections (2020) was the organization of snap parliamentary elections and a purge of the parliament.

4. The realization of parliamentary elections is regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova (1994), the Electoral Code (1997), the Law on Political Parties (2007), the Code of the Republic of Moldova about Audiovisual Media Services (2018) and other relevant legal acts, as well as the provisions and decisions of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC). Under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the “Instruction on the organization and conduct of elections by the Central Electoral Commission in the context of a pandemic with regard to COVID-19” was approved, aimed at ensuring all regulatory requirements during the election period in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease.

In the elections, the CEC faced problems related to an insufficient budget to fully finance the electoral process. The government was barely able to find the money required for the election campaign, since the budget of the country did not include additional funds for organizing snap elections.

5. The media landscape in Moldova can be assessed as pluralistic, but polarized, which is associated with the dependence of the mass media on political and party interests. Television is the main source of information; online sources and social media are also popular.

Considering the influence of the media on the formation of geopolitical preferences of the electorate, it should be noted that in the time when I. Dodon was in power, being perceived as a pro-Russian president in the mass consciousness, Russian news programs and political discussion programs were not broadcast in Moldova. With the arrival of the pro-European President M. Sandu, the broadcast of Russian news programs was resumed. This step of the new president was a great help in overcoming the geopolitical split in the Moldovan society.

6. To take part in the snap parliamentary elections, 23 electoral competitors were registered: 20 political parties; the two electoral blocs of PSRM-PCRM, which

⁴ Ю. Семенова, “«Очистить от коррупции». Дан старт кампании к досрочным выборам в парламент Молдовы” (Ū. Semenova, “«Ochistiti ot korruptsii» Dan start kampanii k dosrochnym vyboram v parlament Moldovy”), *DW. Made for Minds*, May 11, 2021. At: <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-moldove-dan-start-kampanii-k-dosrochnym-vyboram-v-parlament/a-57485469>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

united the Party of Socialists and the Party of Communists, and the Renato Usatii bloc, consisting of two left-wing parties – Nashi, led by businessman R. Usatii, and Rodina, led by E. Chobu, the former Ambassador of Moldova to Romania; and one independent candidate.

7. The main opponents were the center-right parties, the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), which are associated with the current president of the country, M. Sandu, and the PSRM-PCRM bloc headed by former presidents of the country V. Voronin (2001–2009) and I. Dodon (2016–2020) on the left wing. According to the results of public opinion polls, the Șor Party and the Renato Usatii bloc were admissible to the parliament, as well.⁵

Sandu's victory in the presidential elections worked in favor of the PAS. The strong points of the party are its well-recognized pre-electoral agenda, which became the continuation of the ideas put forward in the presidential elections ("fighting corruption," "final cleanup of the political system," etc.), support from external forces, namely the EU, the United States and Romania, as well as the vigorous support of the Moldovan diaspora in Europe and North America.

The weak points of the PAS are a rather weak team made up mainly of employees of different NGOs who are very far from the needs of ordinary citizens and have no experience in public administration, and the right-wing radical sentiments of some of its leaders and activists,⁶ who are capable of alienating part of the electorate and pushing them slowly towards the political center. M. Sandu managed to smooth out the right-wing radical background in the presidential and parliamentary elections.

On the left wing, the Party of Socialists and the Party of Communists, under the pretext of uniting leftist forces under the threat of the West, established an electoral bloc. The bloc's representatives emphasized the influence of the West on the elections in Moldova. The main ideas of the electoral program were the strengthening of the statehood and the independence of Moldova, the economic development of the country and the improvement of the well-being of citizens, traditional values, and the Orthodoxy.

The Șor Party is headed by the mayor of Orhei, Ilan Shor, who was involved in the theft of one billion and is a fugitive of Moldovan justice taking asylum in Israel. The party opened specialized social shops in the cities of the country for vulnerable sections of the population and implements other social projects.

⁵ *Alegerile parlamentare 2021*, July 12, 2021. At: <http://alegeri.md/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

⁶ 3. Тодуа, "Молдавия: 10 лет имитации реформ", *Независимая газета*, June 6, 2021 (Z. Todua, "Moldaviya: 10 let imitatsii reform", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*). At: https://www.ng.ru/dipkurser/2021-06-06/11_8166_moldova.html, last accessed November 30, 2021.

R. Usatii is the leader of Our Party and the mayor of the city of Balti, the second economic center of the country at the time of the elections. In 2014, on suspicion of external funding (from Russia), his party was removed from the election campaign three days before the elections (in April 2021, the Supreme Court of Justice declared this decision illegal). Later, several criminal cases were brought against him; he left Moldova and came back in 2019 after the collapse of the oligarchic regime.

His populism effectively attracts Moldovan voters. In the presidential elections of 2020, he was third in terms of the number of votes. The party hoped that Usatii would repeat the success of the presidential elections, and also counted on the votes of the residents of Balti and the diaspora in Russia.⁷

8. As of June 1, the Central Electoral Commission had registered 3,282,837 voters, including 258,691 voters living in settlements on the left bank of the Dniester (Transnistria) that are not controlled by the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova.⁸

Taking into account the growing electoral activity of the Moldovan diaspora, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration proposed opening 191 polling stations abroad in 38 countries. The CEC pushed for fewer polling stations, but after a decision of the Supreme Court, 150 polling stations were opened in 36 countries, 11 more than in the presidential election of 2020. As an exception, Moldovan voters abroad could vote with expired Moldovan passports.⁹

9. Only 52.3% of voters took part in the parliamentary elections.¹⁰ This is lower than in the second round of the 2020 presidential elections (58.22%).

To enter parliament a party must gain 5% of the vote, an electoral bloc requires 7%, and an independent candidate must win 2%. According to the results of the elec-

⁷ “Ренато Усатый ушел не по-молдавски. Что это значит для «Нашей партии» и политики в Молдове” (“Renato Usatyi ushel ne po-moldavski. Chto eto znachit dlya «Nashei partii» i politiki v Moldove”), *NewsMaker*. At: <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/renato-usatyy-ushel-ne-po-moldavski-cto-eto-znachit-dlya-nashey-partii-i-politiki-v-moldove/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

⁸ *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova*. At: https://a.cec.md/ru/obshchee-chislo-izbirateley-vklyuchennykh-v-gosudarstvennyy-registr-izbirateley--2781_99716.html, last accessed November 30, 2021.

⁹ ENEMO International Election Observation Mission Early Parliamentary Elections, *Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, Moldova, July 12, 2021. At: <http://enemo.eu/uploads/file-manager/ENEMOStatementofPreliminaryFindingsandConclusionsMoldovaEarlyParliamentaryElectionsJuly2021.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹⁰ Comisia Electorală Centrală, Curtea Constituțională, *Hotărârea nr. 20 din 23 iulie 2021 cu privire la confirmarea rezultatelor alegerilor parlamentare anticipate din 11 iulie 2021 și validarea mandatelor deputaților aleși*, August 5, 2021. At: <https://www.constcourt.md/ccdocview.php?tip=hotariri&docid=776&l=ro>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

tions, the PAS received 52.8% of the votes (63 seats in parliament). For the first time in modern Moldovan political history, a center-right party won more than 50% of the votes, which allowed it to form the governing bodies of parliament and appoint a one-party government (51 mandates). The Bloc of Communists and Socialists entered parliament with 27.17% (32 seats: 22 – PSRM, 10 – PCRM) and the Șor Party with 5.74% (6 seats). The remaining 20 competitors did not pass the required threshold for being elected to parliament.

The victory of the PAS is compared to the victory of the Party of Communists in the parliamentary elections of 2001, when the party won 71 parliamentary seats. The communists had the opportunity to implement constitutional amendments and amend the country's Constitution with so many mandates (67).

10. The Diaspora unambiguously voted for the PAS, which gained 86.23% of the votes abroad. However, it would be a mistake to think that the Party of Action and Solidarity won thanks to the diaspora. The party won in the motherland, and the diaspora only strengthened the final election result in favor of the party.

The geopolitical vector of the pre-election platforms of electoral competitors

An analysis of the pre-electoral platforms of the political parties participating in the snap parliamentary elections of 2021 shows that, in contrast to the parliamentary and presidential elections of the previous decade, electoral competitors focused more on the internal problems the country faced. The platforms of the participants were primarily devoted to socio-economic issues, the fight against corruption, judicial reform and, to a lesser extent, the geopolitical orientation of the country. On the one hand, this indicates that the choice of the geopolitical vector is no longer as relevant as it used to be. On the other hand, it speaks about the level of “maturation” of electors and a more pragmatic approach to elections of the legislative body.

9 out of 23 electoral competitors on the pre-election platforms, including the Șor Party, which entered parliament, did not touch upon the issues of Moldova's foreign policy at all. Nevertheless, the majority of political parties on their pre-electoral platforms paid attention to the development of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova.

1. In its pre-electoral program “Moldova of Good Times,” the center-right PAS reproduced the reform program proposed by M. Sandu during the presidential elections

in 2020.¹¹ In the field of foreign policy, the PAS states that the strategic orientation of the country is European integration, making it necessary to deepen the political dialogue with the EU to strengthen the sustainability of the Republic of Moldova in the fields of democracy, economy, climate, energy, and security, including in the context of the new results of the Eastern Partnership.

The party proposed intensifying the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU; approving and implementing the new Association Agenda with the EU for 2021–2027; accelerating the implementation of EU standards; providing native producers with the necessary support, and promoting the structural changes necessary to increase the competitiveness of the national economy.

The PAS is committed to strengthening strategic partnerships with Romania and Ukraine. But if relations with Romania are based on common values, in the relations between Chisinau and Kiev, in addition to the general movement along the path of European integration, there are toxic issues related to the Dniester River, joint control of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border on the Transnistrian perimeter, etc.¹² The development of regional partnership for European integration with Ukraine and Georgia is considered an important direction for the party. The party also intends to resume a strategic dialogue with the USA.

Regarding the cooperation with the Russian Federation as one of the foreign policy directions, the PAS stands for a positive, respectful and pragmatic political dialogue with Russia. The restoration of trade and economic relations and the protection of the rights of citizens of the Republic of Moldova are proclaimed as a significant objective.

Other right-wing and center-right parties (Platform “Yes,” PDM, “Democracy at Home,” Party for Development and Unification of Moldova, “New Historical Choice,” Ecological Party of the Greens) adhere to similar views. The National Unification Party (PUN), New Historical Choice Party, and Alliance for the Unification of Romanians (AUR) promote the idea of uniting Moldova and Romania. It is worth mentioning that the right-wing electors mostly voted for the PAS, the winning party, so the unionist parties together gained less than 1% of the vote.

¹¹ Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate, *Moldova vremurilor bune. Program Electoral. Alegerile parlamentare din 11 iulie 2021*, June 9, 2021. At: <http://alegeri.md/images/a/ad/Program-electoral-pas-2021.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹² В. Портников, “Молдова после выборов,” *Радио Свобода*, July 20, 2021 (V. Protnikov, “Moldova posle vyborov,” *Radio Svoboda*). At: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/moldova-posle-vyborov-efir-v-20-32/31367220.html>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

2. The pre-electoral platform of the PSRM-PCRM bloc was based on the solution of socio-economic problems. With regard to the geopolitical vector, the bloc carried out a very controversial campaign. The socialists claim to be the last stronghold preventing Moldova from leaving Russia and swinging towards NATO and Europe, whereas the communists, on behalf of former president Voronin, state that European integration is the main idea of Moldovan statehood, and it shall be included in the Moldovan constitution.¹³

In the pre-election program of 2021, the situation found its expression in the preferences of the bloc – to build a strategic dialogue with Russia, but at the same time maintain the relations with the EU in their current form. The bloc is ready to cooperate with external partners to solve hot social and economic issues while steadily respecting the national and state interests of a sovereign and independent Moldova and its citizens. “The one and only geopolitical vector that the country should be guided by in the foreign arena is the national interests of the Republic of Moldova.”¹⁴

Despite the fact that the PSRM opposed the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, the party acknowledges that the Agreement would play a favorable role in deepening Moldova’s relations with the European Union and granting our country a visa-free regime with the EU countries. PSRM stands for the preservation of this Agreement, subject to changes in a number of articles which currently harm Moldovan producers and are incompatible with our traditional values.

PSRM considers the eastern vector as a significant condition for sustainable development of the country. Moldova can become a full-fledged participant in the Eurasian integration processes. PSRM stands for the development of good neighborly and strategic relations with Ukraine and Romania, the expansion of bilateral partnership with the United States and the comprehensive development of relations with Turkey and China.

The bloc of communists and socialists had to reckon with the changes that took place in the mass consciousness of the Moldovan population. It had to modify its message, stating that Moldova was not choosing between the EU and Russia, but “between external governance and statehood” in these parliamentary elections.¹⁵ At

¹³ “Алексей Мартынов: Вместо сближения с РФ Додон решал личные вопросы” (“Alexei Martynov: Vmesto sblizheniya s Rf Dodon reshal lichnye voprosy”), *Alfa News*, July 6, 2021. At: <http://alfanews.md/index.php?newsid=24927>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹⁴ Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova, *Programul Partidului socialiștilor din Republica Moldova*. At: <https://socialistii.md/program-psrm>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹⁵ Р. Владимиров, “Итоги парламентских выборов в Молдове 11 июля 2021: Всѣ решила диаспора – PAS получает большинство, а Блок коммунистов и социалисты вместе с партией ШОР будут в оппозиции” (R. Vladimirov, “Itogi parlamentskih vyborov v Moldove 11 iulya 2021:

the same time, they positioned themselves as supporters of sovereignty and statehood, and M. Sandu and PAS as advocates of external control.

The Renato Usatii Bloc, the Party of Collective Action – Civil Congress, and the Party of Regions, advocating the strengthening of Moldovan statehood, independent development of Moldova and mutually beneficial cooperation with both East and West, and the Patriots of Moldova, supporting unification with Russia, stood on the left wing.

The issue of geopolitical choice through the prism of public opinion

Public opinion is an essential component of the political life of a country. In the mass consciousness of Moldova, the issue of geopolitical choice was expressed in the form of a split between the European Union and the Eurasian Customs Union.

1. Public opinion polls conducted in 2003–2021 show that the idea of European integration in the Republic of Moldova has many supporters.

The largest number of supporters of European integration was noted in November 2007 (76.2%). This is two times higher than the lowest indicator, in October 2016 (38%). The highest indicator (over 70%) of supporters of European integration was achieved in 2006–2008. This is because Romania joined the European Union in 2007, and the Republic of Moldova became an immediate neighbor of the EU. The revitalization of the activities of international actors (EU and USA) in relation to Moldova stimulated the European expectations of the Moldovan population.¹⁶

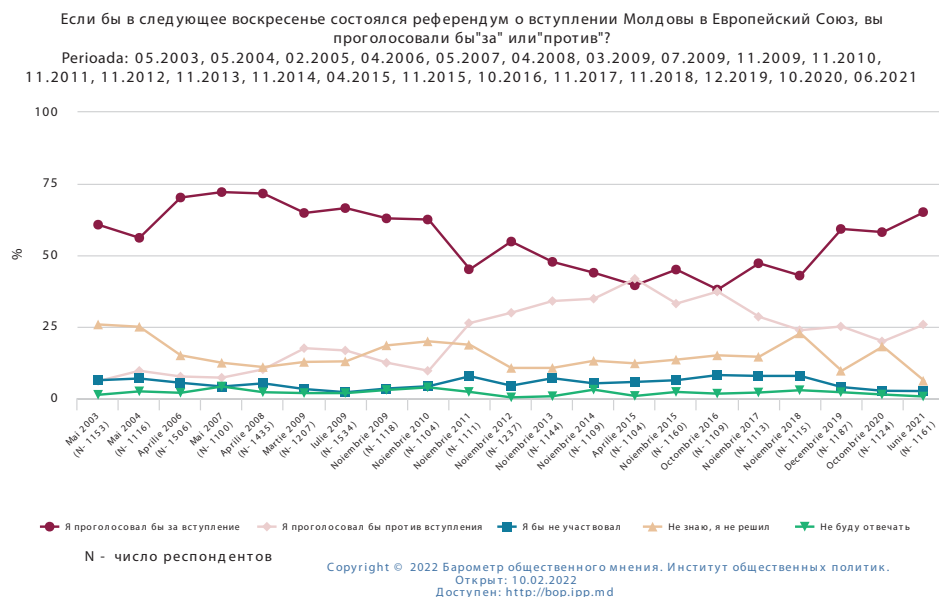
The coming to power of the Alliance for European Integration (AEI) in 2009 gave a new impetus to the European integration expectations of the Moldovan population. However, the lack of success in the socio-economic development of the country, lack of professionalism in management, high level of corruption, and the theft of a billion led to people associating the idea of European integration with the negative activities of the AEI. This led to a decrease in support for European integration and an increase in

Vse reshila diaspora – PAS poluchaet bolishinstvo, a Blok kommunistov i socialisty vmeste s partiei SHOR budut v oppozitsii”), *KP*, July 12, 2021. At: <https://www.kp.md/daily/28302.5/4442844/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹⁶ В. Мошняга, В. Цуркан, П. Байор, “Общественное мнение Республики Молдова о внешней политике страны”. В: *Детерминанты и перспективы политики европейской интеграции Республики Молдова*, Краков: Ксиенгарния Академицка 2015 (V. Mosneaga, V. Curkan and P. Bajor, “Obschestvennoe mnenie Respubliki Moldova o vneshnej politike strany”. In: *Determinanty i perspektivy politiki evropejskoj integracii Respubliki Moldova*, Krakov: Księgarnia Akademicka 2015), p. 138.

Euroscepticism in the Moldovan society. Opposition to European integration peaked in April 2015, at 41.8%.

Diagram 1. The dynamics of answers to the question “If a referendum on Moldova’s accession to the EU is held next Sunday, you will vote...” (%)



Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2003–2021. At: <http://bop.ipp.md/ru>.

In the Moldovan mass consciousness, the EU gained a competitor widely promoted by the Russian mass media, the Customs Union (CU). Playing on the nostalgic post-Soviet consciousness of a significant part of the Moldovan population, the media does not focus on the benefits and losses if it joins the CU, the real state of affairs in this regional entity.¹⁷

In April 2014, the Republic of Moldova entered a visa-free regime with the EU, a real achievement along the path of European integration. During tourist trips and short-term migration, Moldovan citizens were able to get acquainted with the life of the EU population. The demonstration effect of the EU contributed to an increase in the number of supporters of the European vector of development of the Republic of Moldova. Since 2016, about half of the respondents support the European integration of the Republic of Moldova. A month before the parliamentary elections of June

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 140–141.

2021, a public opinion poll showed that almost two-thirds of the participants would vote for the accession of Moldova to the EU.

The number of Moldovan citizens who do not have a definite position on this issue reached the lowest indicator in June 2021 (6.1%). The highest indicator of uncertain citizens was recorded in May 2004 (25.8%), when the idea of integration into the EU was new to Moldovan citizens, and they had not yet formed their attitudes towards it.

1. Support for joining the Customs Union peaked in April 2015 (57.8%), while it reached a low in June 2020 (30.1%), and it is associated with the disappointment of the Moldovan population with the activities of president Dodon and his endless expectations with regard to Russia.¹⁸

Although Moldova received a status of an observer in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in May 2018, the number of opponents of the country's integration into the CU is quite high. The highest indicator was recorded in June 2021 (47.5%), which is almost 2.5 times higher than the lowest indicator in May 2012 (19.5%). The number of unsure voters on this issue has decreased three times.

This is the nature of public opinion in Moldova in the context of separate consideration of the possibility of joining one or another regional interstate formation.

3. The positions of various ethnic groups regarding Moldova's accession to the EU or the Customs Union are of interest. The difference between positions is based on the criterion of the representative of the titular nation or ethnic minority of the Republic of Moldova. In the last poll of the Public Opinion Barometer (June 2021), the category "ethnicity" was represented by only two options – "Moldovans/Romanians" and "others," without specifying ethnic minorities.

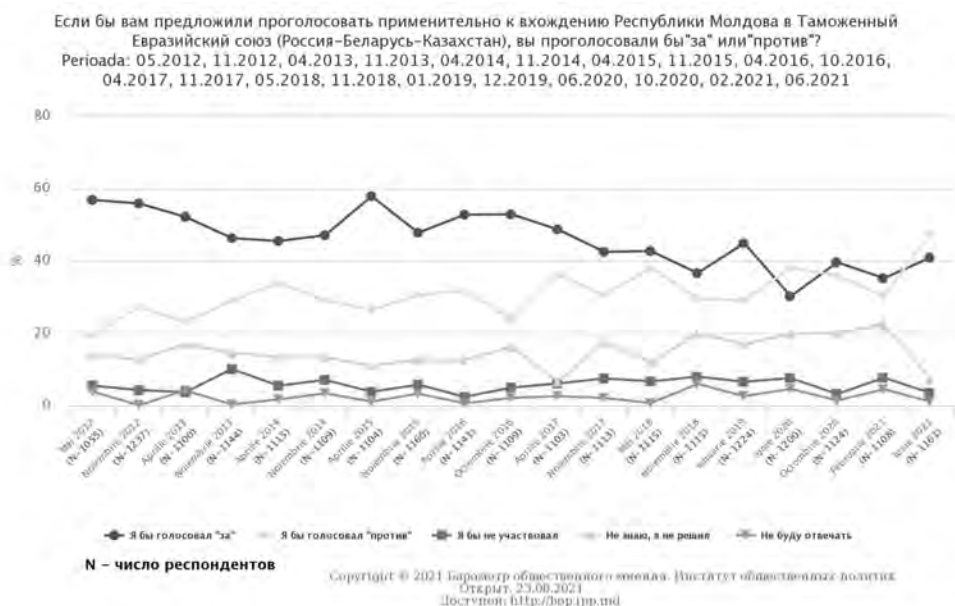
Polls show that representatives of the titular nation in the majority (3:1) would vote "for" the EU, while representatives of ethnic minorities would vote against joining the EU in a ratio of 1:3,5. At the same time, the results would differ materially if voting for the Eurasian Economic Union. One-third of Moldovans/Romanians and three-quarters of representatives of ethnic minorities would vote for joining the EEU. Among those who voted "against," the ratio between representatives of the titular nation and ethnic minorities would be 4:1.¹⁹ As for making a choice between the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU or the Eurasian Economic Union, the results would be as follows: the Moldovans/Romanians would vote against the EU at a ratio

¹⁸ Р. Шевченко, "Итоги парламентских выборов в Молдове" (R. Shevchenko, "Itogi parlamentskih vyborov v Moldove"), July 13, 2021. At: <https://ava.md/2021/07/13/itogi-parlamentskih-vyborov-v-moldove/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹⁹ Institutul de Politici Publice, *Raport Barometrul Opiniei publice 2021*, July 2021. At: <https://ipp.md/2021-07/barometrul-opinii-publice-iunie-2021/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

of 3.5:1, and the representatives of ethnic minorities would be against at a ratio of 1:5. There are more representatives of ethnic minorities than Moldovans/Romanians (11.8% and 9.1%, respectively) who found it difficult to answer the question or did not answer it at all. These results are evidence of ethnic tension in the Moldovan society, which is a consequence of the events of the early 1990s.

Diagram 2. The dynamics of answers to the question “If you were asked to vote in relation to the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the Eurasian Customs Union (Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan), you would vote...” (i%)



Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2012–2021. At: <http://bop.ipp.md/ru>.

Thus, standing between the two regional geopolitical systems – the EU and the EEU – the public opinion of the Republic of Moldova is influenced by many internal and external factors, resulting in a contradictory and not always logical picture.

Summary and recommendations

Analyzing the topic, we came to the following conclusions:

1. Despite the complexity and uncertainty of the actions taken, Moldova is moving along the path of European integration. This is due to the international position

of the country, the influence of external actors, the difficult socio-economic situation inside the country and the course of socio-political transformations, the electoral behavior of political parties, etc.

2. As a result of the snap parliamentary elections of 2021, three political parties entered the country's parliament. For the first time in modern Moldovan political history, a center-right party was able to gain more than half of voters. The stable parliament of the Republic of Moldova was now ruled by pro-European forces. A pro-presidential parliamentary majority was formed; a one-party government was created with full power and the ability to really become a capable and working government, supported by international structures and the international community.

3. An analysis of the pre-election platforms of electoral competitors shows that the problem of geopolitical choice in its classical version (EU or Russia), which traditionally dominated in the elections of post-Soviet Moldova, was not the main one, or it was modified among the main participants in the parliamentary race. However, it cannot be claimed that this problem has been resolved. The idea of a geopolitical choice was transformed into the formula "sovereignty or external control." In these elections, the main issues of the PAS were victory in the fight against corruption and the venality and inefficiency of the legal system.

4. Public opinion polls record the attitude of the Moldovan population towards various geopolitical projects – integration with the EU or integration with Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union. The results show an increase in the number of supporters of integration into the EU and, accordingly, a decrease in interest in the EEU. Most ethnic Moldovans support European integration, while representatives of national minorities more often identify themselves with an orientation towards Russia.

Based on the conclusions reached, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. To systematically and comprehensively inform the population of the Republic of Moldova about the results of the elections, the situation in the country, and the achievements of the authorities on the way to European integration.

2. Taking into account the geopolitical position of Moldova, the state authorities should develop relations with both the EU countries and Russia, emphasizing that the strategic goal of the country is European integration.

3. It is necessary to conduct intercultural dialogue among different ethnic groups, taking into account the specific interests of representatives of non-titular nation in terms of the geopolitical vector of the country's development. This will contribute to the establishment of interethnic harmony and political stability in Moldovan society.

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The publication contains a collection of articles devoted to the most important aspects related to the process of transformation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus under the Eastern Partnership program. The book covers the results of a research project by an international team of scientists who present their findings on the policy of European integration, the role and importance of the Eastern Partnership in the process of change, and give recommendations for its implementation and activities in the future.



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