

ADEPT Political Commentaries

March-June 2003

Revision of the local public administration system

March 5, 2003

Local public administration system has taken center stage again. It was easy to foresee that sooner or later Communist Party would revise local public administration, as it was among its key promises made in the parliamentary elections of February 25, 2001.

There are enough reasons to believe that other motives than increasing the efficiency of the local public administration or meeting Council of Europe standards determined Communists to revise the local public administration system, namely inertia in changing attitudes towards issues of paramount importance for the country. This inertia is very illustrative for the Moldovan political elite as a whole. While in opposition the Communist party rejected all the initiatives of the ruling Alliance for Democracy and Reforms, including local public administration reform, which was implemented with the assistance of international organizations. Later on, once acceding to power the Communist Party continued the economic reforms initiated by their predecessors, which they so much criticized. The fact is that the economic reforms have been imposed and coordinated with international monetary organizations IMF and WB.

On the contrary, local public administration reform initiated back in 1998 was not imposed by the aforesaid organizations, that is why Communist Party is committed to fulfil its electoral promise at least as far as the local government is concerned, despite any possible shortcomings like the lack of funding or violation of the constitutional principle of local autonomy. Presidential Spokesman confirmed this when stated that the President would probably not promulgate the Law on Local Public Administration before consultations with the Congress of Local and Regional Powers of the Council of Europe.

Having said that, let's consider all the events in the chronological order. On November 6, 1998 the XIV Legislature Parliament adopted the Law no. 186 on the Local Public Administration with the majority vote of the Alliance for Democracy and Reforms, whereas on November 12 passed the Law no. 191 on the Administrative-territorial Division of the Republic of Moldova. Under the later, the country was to be divided in counties, thus reducing by three times the number of second-level administrative-territorial units and by 200 the number of first-level units, i.e. mayoralties. In its Resolution no. 293 of 02.19.1999 the Parliament set the date for general local elections for May 23, 1999. Administrative-territorial reform was to be completed after the elections with the formation of public administration bodies at the county and local level (municipalities, communes, and villages).

On December 28, 2001 by the majority vote of the Communist faction and several independent MPs, the XV Legislature Parliament passed the Law no. 781 on the modification and completion of the Law on Local Public Administration. Prior to that the Parliament passed a new Law on Administrative-Territorial Division of the Republic of Moldova to return to the old administrative-territorial division, i.e. rayons. The procedure of mayor election was also changed, under the modifications they were to be elected by the local councils. In compliance with the newly adopted law, on

February 5, 2002 the Parliament issued Resolution no. 807 on establishing the date for general local elections for April 7, 2002. Two weeks later the Constitutional Court

outlawed the said Resolution on the grounds it ran counter to the Constitution. Later on February 14, in its Resolution no. 13 the Court outlawed several provisions of the Law on modification and completion of the Law on Local Public Administration and Law on modification of the Electoral Code. The Parliament had to comply and firstly suspended the enforcement of the said laws, but later even substantially revised them. Simultaneously, opposition in Parliament notified Council of Europe on problems related to local government in the Republic of Moldova. In its turn, through its specialized bodies Council of Europe recommended Moldovan authorities to reconsider the modifications they operated to the electoral and local government laws and to submit them for the expertise of the Council of Europe.

Recently, the Parliament amended the Electoral Code and restored all the provisions related to the direct election of the mayors by the entire community.

Last week the Parliament commenced examining a new Law on Local Public Administration. The new law compiles the majority of 1998 law provisions. Consequently the ruling party abandoned the idea of establishing "vertical power".

The main difference between the two laws is that the prefect institution (cornerstone of decentralization) is abolished and the procedure of forming local government and their prerogatives are changed. Furthermore, the law provides that local government shall be formed in line with the new administrative-territorial division.

Although largely criticized by non-governmental organizations working in the field, it's very likely that the rayons would be restored no latter than spring-summer. Needless to say, a lot of problems are expected to surface upon the enforcement of the law. Any reform requires financial, material and human resources. In the last two years, the ruling party complained on numerous occasions that it lacked qualified people for an efficient state administration. At the central level the problem might be partially solved by frequent employees' turnout (until the people devoted to the party acquire enough experience). However the same method may not be applied to the newly formed local governments (three times exceeding the current number of local public administration officers).

To conclude, under given circumstances the only thing opposition and civil society can do is to point to the shortcomings, negative impact and high cost of revising local public administration system. Noteworthy, the estimations made by the government for enforcing the reform differ significantly (5-10 times) from the ones made by the non-governmental organizations working in the field. Despite the criticism, there are enough reasons to believe that the local public administration system shall be revised after all, and neither Council of Europe nor international monetary organizations would insist on the contrary. However, it is to be expected that the said organizations would react in case the revision hinders the economic growth or is to much burden for the state budget. Things would be clarified after general local elections.

As strange as it might seem the ruling party commits itself to an undertaking, i.e. revising local public administration, without being 100% certain that it would lead to an economic growth. If the reform fails it would inevitably lead to social and later on political problems.

Transdnestrian conflict solution - a new stage

March 19, 2003

1. New political circumstances
2. Sanctions impact
3. Tiraspol's diplomatic victories
4. The limits of the compromise

1. New political circumstances

Albeit a month already passed since the President made public his initiative on settling the Transdnestrian conflict via developing a new Constitution jointly with Tiraspol administration, the situation is still quite fuzzy. One thing is for sure, Moldovan authorities are willing to convert the country into a federation, whereas Transdnestrian side to accept the idea in principle. And although, OSCE, EU and US have intensified their diplomatic efforts in this respect, the outlines of the would-be federation are rather vague.

A change is to be noticed in the style of the media coverage as well, they tend to tailor their forecasts and comments to the latest developments and their likely impact on the conflict resolution.

Let us consider now the latest developments. It has been repeatedly pointed that this sudden interest in Transdnestrian conflict has been determined in the first place by the external environment, namely EU and NATO enlargement. One may say that Transdnestria's turn has come to take the center stage and be in the spotlight of superpowers, i.e. UE and US. Western bureaucratic machinery functions in such a manner as center stage matters are seriously dealt with until an acceptable solution is reached.

From this perspective, the recently released document "Wider Europe - Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors" of the European Commission opens new perspectives for the Republic of Moldova. Besides an outline of the EU policies towards neighborhood countries the document also includes a chapter on "Greater EU Political Involvement in Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management". The chapter points that EU should take a more active role to facilitate the settlement of dispute over Transdnestria and engage in post-conflict internal security arrangements. The document reads that those actions are to be undertaken "in support of the efforts of OSCE and other mediators".

Interestingly enough, another document, namely EU decision on banning Tiraspol leaders' access to EU, was made public on February 27, 2003. Greece, currently holding EU Presidency announced that Transdnestria leadership, a total of 17 persons are banned from entering EU and US due to their "permanent obstructionism and refusal to work towards improving the current situation, thus thwarting negotiations between Chisinau and Tiraspol".

2. Sanctions impact

Apparently, the event has taken Moldovan authorities by surprise, as it took them quite a while to react and endorse EU and US stance. On the contrary, Tiraspol authorities had an immediate, self-defense reaction, although not quite appropriate. Firstly, on March 1, 2003 they appealed to the Russian Embassy to the Republic of Moldova for help. The funny thing is that although signed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Transnistria (pretending to be an independent state) the letter goes on explaining that the aforesaid persons are the citizens of the Russia Federation, consequently the Embassy Of Russian Federation should defend their rights.

Secondly, the funny thing is Transnistrian authorities accused UE of applying "double standards" on the grounds that on the one hand they allow "Chechen terrorists' access on the soil of EU", and on the other ban Transnistrians' access. This time Transnistrian authorities really blundered, when they couldn't make their mind whether to speak up as leaders of an independent state (Transdnestria), or as citizens of Russia. During the last 10 years Transdnestrians have skillfully exploited "multiple personality syndrome".

Needless to say, Tiraspol leaders compare Transdnestrian and Chechen conflict, however only to the extent it is suitable to them. However, others may draw those parallels to the end so as to clarify who is after all resorting to "double standards". EU is indeed very consistent in its policies, namely insisting on political resolution of the conflicts. There was no trial on Chechen leaders and their war crimes have still to be proven, however they are not allowed to take part in the political dialogue with Russian authorities. The latter prefer, instead, to resort to force and to cooperate with the Chechen groups loyal to them.

On the other hand, the case of Transnistria is totally different, i.e. the breakaway leaders are sanctioned for obstructing the negotiations with Moldovan authorities, that are endorsed by the mediator and guarantor countries.

It was supposed that under panic, Transdnestrian authorities forgot that their appeals to Russia might not only lead to confusions and misinterpretations but also may tarnish the image of the guarantor country itself. For one thing, Russian press has recently followed the issue of "double standards" from a totally different perspective, i.e. Russia was fighting secessionism on its own territory, while it encouraged it in Moldova and Georgia. There is another reason why it was dangerous to compare Transdnestria and Chechnya, Council of Europe is considering establishing a War Crime Tribunal on Chechnya. Although it is not clear yet if this would really happen, Russians still have enough reasons to worry. Furthermore, 4 judges of the European Court for Human Rights are on a visit in Chisinau to determine, among others, what was Russian Army's involvement in the 1992 Transdnestrian military conflict. This is another reason why the comparison with Chechnya was inappropriate.

Russian authorities had a reserved but adequate reaction. In an attempt to preserve their influence on the breakaway region, official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Aleksandr Iakovenko, stated "Russia pleads for handling very carefully the ban for Transdnestrian leaders' travel to EU". This rather diplomatic wording was aimed firstly to defend Russian citizens who established a breakaway regime on the

soil of the Republic of Moldova and secondly to warn the guarantor countries on the pitfalls of such decisions, in particular over obstruction of the negotiation process.

Noteworthy, Ukrainian authorities endorsed the ban on Transdnistrian leaders' travel to EU and US. Furthermore, under the pressure of the EU, now they are willing to recognize and observe customs requirements of the Republic of Moldova, under which Transdnistrian goods would cross the Ukrainian border only if bearing the customs seal of the Republic of Moldova. If this happens, Transdnistria would lose the main advantage in claiming an equal status to the Republic of Moldova, or its reason d'etre as an independent state.

3. Tiraspol's diplomatic victories

Albeit the conjuncture became more favorable to Chisinau, Tiraspol leaders have proven on numerous occasions that they have numerous diplomatic resources to their asset and are able to convert them into propagandistic achievements. Since OSCE made public its federalization plan, the model of the federation to be chosen has been at issue, as have been the prerogatives of the center and its subjects. So far Tiraspol leaders have managed to get ahead of Moldovan side by convincing guarantor countries and OSCE to sign draft agreements suitable for them only. Later on they announced that "the entire international community endorses resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict, except for the obstructionist Chisinau".

This was the case on December 5, 2002 on the eve of Porto Summit, when Transdnistrian authorities, together with OSCE and guarantor countries signed draft Agreement on the so-called "contractual federation". Another example is the Protocol on the mechanism of working out and adopting the Constitution of the federative state released on February 28. Again guarantor countries and OSCE endorsed the document, which Chisinau refused to sign. Needless to say there is no mention in the Protocol of the draft Agreement developed by President Voronin, an alternative to the Protocol. Moreover, clear recommendations from the President Voronin's Agreement have been replaced by very loose and vague ones in the Transdnistrian Protocol. This was probably done to enable Transdnistrian side to better negotiate the principle of "equality of the parties", which it has been promoting. For instance, under the Transdnistrian Protocol the Constitutional Commission to be established would start its activity by defining some principles already provided for in the Chisinau's Agreement. Again, the reason for these changes might be to break the deadlines set by Moldovan authorities for settling the conflict, namely by the next parliamentary elections. Good thinking from Transdnistrian side, as being in a shortage of time Moldovan authorities would be more willing to make significant concessions.

It is worth mentioning that mediators stated on numerous occasions they would endorse any proposal both parties would agree with. Having said that it is not clear why OSCE and guarantor countries endorse documents not signed by Moldova. For instance guarantor countries and OSCE refrained from signing the draft Agreement worked out by Moldovan authorities two weeks earlier, although this document was apparently chosen as a basis for future negotiations. Obviously, Moldovan diplomacy has failed to convince mediators to sign the Agreement launched by President Voronin. To achieve a balance, Moldovan diplomats may want to pursue mediators to

endorse only the documents already signed by the Republic of Moldova, or those signed by both parties to the conflict.

4. The limits of the compromise

Under given circumstances new grounds for compromise are being sought. Chisinau could not afford to be too optimistic, even if the recent developments seem to be on its side. And this because Republic of Moldova still heavily relies on Russia's energy and distribution markets, which in the long run makes Chisinau politically dependent.

Albeit OSCE draft Agreement of July 3, 2002 and President Voronin Agreement released on February 14 outline the principles for edifying a federative state, the principles of negotiation are still unclear. Transdnistrian leaders continue to insist on a "contractual federation" based on the "equality of the parties" stipulated in the Memorandum of May 8, 1997.

Meanwhile, EU and US decision to ban Transdnistria's leaders travel as well as many decisions to follow on the export of goods indicate that the parties are not equal. Furthermore, it is for the first time that sanctions have been applied to Tiraspol and they actually proved to be effective in determining Tiraspol to make concessions, in particular regarding the withdrawal of the Russian munitions from the region. One may say, this is an expression of goodwill from Tiraspol authorities, an attempt to avoid other sanctions in the future. In fact they stated that the sanctions were nothing but "inertia effect" from the time negotiations were at a deadlock. However, it is clear now that Chisinau does not object such inertia effects.

Moldovan authorities may want to clarify what other sanctions could be imposed on Tiraspol and to what extent they would determine further concessions, however so as not to affect the negotiations or displease Russia. In fact during his last meeting with President Voronin, Vladimir Putin insisted on granting Transdnistria a "reliably guaranteed status". This is a rather broad scope, but trespassing it would cause considerable economic problems to Chisinau. That is why, in the negotiations that have resumed this week all these grounds would be tried out.

According to some experts, the next sanction might be "freezing personal bank accounts" of the Tiraspol leaders. In fact, nobody knows if such accounts really exist. Last year Transdnistrian press reported that the highest official's salary amounts to \$150. However the incident in Vienna airport, when Igor Smirnov was detained for several hours leads us to idea that after all, Transdnistrian leaders have an interest in travelling to the West.

Indeed these are just speculations aimed to prove that behind the pretended modesty displayed by Transdnistrian authorities lie their obscure economic interests. Undermining those interests might determine Tiraspol leaders to give up their hopes on the regime that they had established.

If we were to assess the opportunities and risks in the conflict settlement, we would find out that they are balanced. Indeed, the changes in EU policies towards neighborhood countries may provide a good opportunity for the Republic of Moldova to make public its stance and actually impose it, although it was previously ignored by the guarantor countries mainly preoccupied with their own interests. Having said that, Moldova may count that guarantor countries would agree on granting Transdnistria the prerogatives ranging between those Crimea enjoys within Ukraine and those of Russian Federation subjects. Experts claim that the efficiency of one model or another may be tested only when applied in practice. However the guarantor countries should not insist on models they themselves refrain from using.

In this respect the proposal of the Russian Ambassador to Moldova seems rather interesting, namely working out the federative Constitution of the Republic of Moldova based on the Constitution of Chechnya, especially as far the citizenship of the federation subject is concerned. Nevertheless, this proposal might work only when the Constitution of the federation subject, i.e. Transdnistria, would be developed. As for the federative Constitution of the Republic of Moldova it has to include the same basic principles the Russian Federation Constitution does. This refers in particular to vertical structure of the law enforcement structures (Justice, Prosecutor Office etc), army, finance, customs, etc. In fact draft Agreement developed by President Voronin provides for all this. As for the citizenship, Article 2 of the Russian Federation should be referred to, providing that Russian citizenship is "unitary and equal". Consequently, if we are to rely on Russian experience than provisions from both federal and federation subjects legislation should be applied accordingly in the case of Moldova.

Going back to the risks, they are considerable as well. Even if the "diplomatic and economic blockade" of Tiraspol regime was to succeed, Russian authorities have already pledged to recompense Transdnistria for not obstructing its munitions withdrawal from the region. This compensation might be sufficient for keeping alive Tiraspol regime up until Chisinau authorities would run short of time, on the eve of parliamentary elections. Furthermore, one may not rule out that economic pressure would be exercised on Chisinau as well, so as to determine it to make concessions as far as the "reliable guaranteed status" for Transdnistria is concerned.

One way or another, future developments in the upcoming months would be rather turbulent.

2003 local elections

March 31, 2003

On March 20 the Parliament set the date for general local elections, i.e. May 25. Under the election law, the "electoral period" commences immediately the election date is set. Firstly, during the electoral campaign rayon and local electoral districts are established. Secondly, rayon, city and village electoral councils are established. In addition, Central Electoral Commission shall develop jointly with the Audiovisual Council "Concept of election coverage in mass media". Only after electoral councils are established will the contestants be able to register and engage fully in the electoral race. CEC has already made public the list of 26 political parties eligible to run in elections.

Furthermore, CEC proceeded to the registration of electoral blocs, it already registered "Moldova Noastra" (Our Moldova) Social-Liberal Alliance Electoral Bloc formed by the Social Democratic Alliance, headed by former Prime Minister Dumitru Braghis, Independent's Alliance headed by incumbent Chisinau Mayor Serafim Urechean; and Liberal Party headed by Veaceslav Untila. The leaders of the newly established electoral bloc stated that one of its primary goals in the long run is the formation of a joint political party. Apparently, Serafim Urechean would lead the bloc. He already made public his intention to run again for the Mayor position. Experts believe the major stake in the upcoming elections would be the mayoralty of the Chisinau Municipality. Serafim Urechean has pretty high chances to win. However, it is very unlikely that he would win from the first round. In local elections of May 23, 1999 Urechean was able to win in the first round only because he had been backed by Alliance for Democracy and Reform coalition holding the majority seats in Parliament. Further, the leadership of the National TV backed and electioneered for him extensively. An evidence to this were the numerous complaints submitted in this respect to the CEC. However, this time the context has changed significantly, Urechean has become an easy target for the authorities. Nevertheless, "Our Moldova" may count on good results in elections.

At the end of the week the formation of a new bloc was made public, formed by the Social-Democratic Party and Social-Liberal Party, called PSD&PSL Bloc. Presumably the newly formed bloc would be a long-term one, for one thing "electoral" does not appear in its title. The bloc would most likely face the same identity crisis as "Our Moldova" Bloc, as it also declares itself to be of liberal and social-democratic orientation. PSD&PSL Bloc could count on the votes of Party of Democratic Forces' elevated electorate, which was quite stable for five electoral campaigns, as was the Christian-Democrats' one. This electorate of Party of democratic Forces had been scattered in the 2001 parliamentary elections due to denigration and libel campaign against the party leader, Valeriu Matei, accused of being involved in some corruption scandals, albeit none of the said allegations was proven later on. Presumably, after the merger of the Party of Democratic Forces with Social-Liberal Party at least a part of the former' electorate (accounting for 9%) would be recovered, whereas the alliance with the Social-Democratic Party would enable the newly established bloc to pass the threshold of representation in 2005 parliamentary elections.

Domestic press claims that the PSD&PSL Bloc may designate Viorel Topa, Former Director of the Banca de Economii (Savings Bank) as its candidate for the Chisinau Mayoralty. Viorel Topa is known as a good expert in finances.

Other political parties are currently in the negotiation stage in view of establishing new electoral blocs. On the right wing, front-line Christian-Democratic People's Party announced that the formation of a single right-wing electoral bloc had failed. That is why, Christian-Democrats who have a very stable and disciplined electorate might form an electoral bloc with another 4-5 small parties. It is unlikely that Christian-Democrats would benefit much from those parties, however the establishment of a Christian-Democratic bloc might eventually determine those small parties to merge with the Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party, thus aiding right-wing electorate in making their choice in elections.

Christian-Democratic leader confirmed the forecasts made earlier one by domestic analysts with regard to designation of Vlad Cubreacov as the party candidate to the Chisinau Mayoralty. Last year, amidst protest rallies, enigmatic kidnapping and not a less enigmatic reappearance, Vlad Cubreacov has become a very popular public figure, especially in the capital city. Christian-Democrats enjoyed a steady 12% rating in Chisinau even before the protest rallies however, they may count that their positions have strengthened ever since.

So far, it is difficult to predict whether other electoral blocs would be established. As for the left wing, a political alliance has already been formed. Nevertheless, the 10 political parties, which established Center-Left Union, announced they would not run jointly in the upcoming local elections. Obviously the leader of the Union is Communist Party, whose rating, according to some opinion polls, has been steadily growing lately. It is expected that the Communist Party would win in almost all rayon electoral districts. Consequently, Communist Party has all the grounds to go alone in race, as it did in the previous 2001 parliamentary elections. Allegedly, the party would designate Vasile Zgardan, Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications to run for the mayoralty, as he is known as a good manager with extensive administrative experience. Zgardan is not member of Communist Party, but being designated by CP, Zgardan might well compete with the Social-Liberal Alliance's, Serafim Urechean. Anyway, experts agree that elections outcome would be decided in the second round, and Serafim Urechean and Vasile Zgardan are the most likely candidates to dispute the mayor seat.

Democratic Party leader, Dumirtu Diacov, also Center-Left Union Coordinator, stated that he would rather his party went alone in the upcoming elections. In such a case the party prospects aren't so bright, albeit it's impressive number skillful administrators. And this because of the party's poor performance in the last parliamentary elections when it pooled only 5%.

Each of the 8 parties members of the Center-Left Union have a very low rating, less than 2%. This has lead experts to the idea that those parties joined the Union in attempt to survive on the political arena, nevertheless this desperate move might prove to have an opposite effect. Firstly, the parties would have to constantly prove their loyalty towards their main coalition partner, i.e. Communist Party and refrain from any kind of criticism. Under those circumstances the said parties wouldn't be

able to devise and carry out an efficient electioneering campaign on the left spectrum. Noteworthy, the Union set 3 major goals: reunification of the country by settling Transdnistrrian conflict; working out a new federative Constitution; promoting European integration of the Republic of Moldova. It is up to the Communist Party whether those objectives would be achieved or not, the rest of the parties having little saying in this matter. It goes without saying that voters may endorse those objectives by casting their vote in favor of the Communist Party, without the intermediary of the 8 small parties.

The Referendum in Transdnistria

April 15, 2003

1. The results of the referendum
2. How was the referendum perceived in Chisinau
3. Fluctuating circumstances and the results of the referendum
4. The propagandistic potential of the "lost" referendum

1. The results of the referendum

On 6 April 2003, the "constitutional referendum on the introduction of the private ownership of land" was held in the Transdnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. On 7 April 2003, the Transdnistrian Central Electoral Commission ruled the referendum invalid according to the preliminary results. 153,140 voters took part in the referendum, which were only 38.92% of the overall number of voters, while the local law required a 50% turnout for the results of the referendum to be validated.

Of those who did take part in it, 52% voted for the introduction of the private ownership of land, whereas 44% opposed the proposed constitutional endorsement.

Beyond doubt, the results of the referendum represent a special phenomenon. This is because ever since the secessionist regime in Transdnistria exists there has been no precedents of the Transdnistrian authorities not getting their proposals approved. The low turnout has been explained by the fact that the organisers of the referendum did not have enough time to explain to the citizens the importance of voting for the private ownership of land. This could be a plausible explanation, more so as the agitation campaign in favour of private ownership of land started as late as February. In any case, there's still a lot of vagueness about the whole thing.

2. How was the referendum perceived in Chisinau

On 4 April, on the eve of the referendum, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM) called upon the citizens of Transdnistria via the government media to vote against the privatisation of land, giving as example the unfortunate experience of "poorly thought and rushed privatisation of land on the right bank of the Dniestr River".

After the preliminary results of the referendum were made public, the CPM Central Committee expressed satisfaction at the fact that the "inhabitants of Transdnistria have demonstrated responsibility in the referendum". To the CPM, the option of the Transdnistrians was a clear "NO" to the issue, and so it was to the very idea of holding it.

This was clearly an attempt to promote the idea that the Transdnistrians follow the CPM Central Committee rather than their authorities in Tiraspol. Probably, this particular case should have shown that, generally, things in Transdnistria change in a manner that the Transdnistrian authorities lose control over the Transdnistrian public opinion.

Indeed, one could believe that the ruling party in Moldova won one battle in the propaganda war that it is leading with Tiraspol. However, things are more complicated than that, and are determined by the fluctuating political circumstances.

3. Fluctuating circumstances and the results of the referendum

Under the current circumstances, the most important question is whether the Transdnistrian authorities really wanted their citizens to vote on the issue of land ownership. It could have been the case that the recent event took place because the Tiraspol elite itself was not so certain of how worthwhile it was to promote their proposal to introduce the private ownership of land.

Such assumptions are well founded. Firstly, one should not overlook the fact that the Transdnistrian regime was established as a "fortress for the preservation of Soviet values" during the collapse of the USSR. From this perspective, there is no doubt that there is a lot of ideological affinity and commonality of political and economic views between the current ruling party in Moldova and the Transdnistrian leaders. To believe that the Transdnistrian elite, who practically has not changed over the past 15 years, shares firm liberal views would be a major blunder. Rather, one can presuppose that the Transdnistrian leaders, just like the communists in Moldova, have to abide by the new economic and political circumstances shaped from the outside. Thus, the current Moldovan authorities carry on the economic policies initiated by the previous "democratic" governments, which the former so vehemently criticised while in opposition.

A telling example is the discrepancy between the views expressed in the recent address by the CPM Central Committee to Transdnistrians and the joint statement by presidents George Bush and Vladimir Voronin during the latter's visit to Washington last December, in which the two Presidents "acknowledge the progress made by Moldova in its transition to the market economy, notably in the agricultural sector."

The same is characteristic of the Transdnistrian authorities who in the last few years have been concerned with the issue of redistributing the property in the region. They kept no secret of the motives behind their proposal to legalise the private ownership of land. They put forward both political and economic arguments, such as, for instance, the fact that agriculture contributed only 1.5% towards the Transdnistrian budget and is collapsing due to the lack of investments which cannot happen as long as private ownership of land is not legalised.

More revealing are the political arguments published by the Transdnistrian official news-agency "Olvia Press", which said that from the perspective of the efforts at conflict resolution through federalisation imposed from outside it is important that the ownership of property and land, which are major strategic resources, should be

assigned to the Transdnistrian citizens, so that after the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict the central federal authorities could not claim property in the region.

It seems obvious that the momentary uncertainty of the political future of the Transdnistrian elite, caused by the pressure from the outside to solve the secessionist conflict through the federalisation of Moldova, forced the regional authorities to initiate in early 2003 the referendum on the issue of land ownership.

Meanwhile, after the referendum was declared, a number of important changes occurred which introduced more clarity and optimism as to the future of the Transdnistrian regime and its current elite. We could refer principally to the statement by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin who insisted to "grant Transdnistria a properly guaranteed status" when he met the Moldovan president Voronin in February 2003. The visits to Moscow in February 2003 of the Transdnistrian leaders have had extremely encouraging results for them as well. The Russian deputy Foreign Minister Veaceslav Trubnikov, for example, stated as a result that "Russia is seeking an arrangement that would include military guarantees for the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict". Russia has even started negotiations with Ukraine and the OSCE on "military guarantees" for the resolution of the conflict. Yet, the most impressive has been the statement by Aleksandr Novojilov, Special Ambassador of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Committee for Political and Security issues of the European Union. He said "Russia does not intend to leave its citizens living on the banks of Dniestr River on their own". Other Russian officials made encouraging statements of economic nature for the Tiraspol authorities in relation to possible financial compensations for the withdrawal of Russian munitions and weapons from Transdnistria.

Things have taken a very dangerous turn in this sense, a situation heralded by the particularly harsh public statements made recently by Mark Tcaciuk, the political adviser to the president, with regard to the Russian officials' actions in support of the Transdnistrians. This has been an almost incredible development, if one takes into account the fact that the current Moldovan authorities show off their strategic partnership with Russia on any occasion, but also the fact that after the reshuffling of the presidential administration in the summer 2002 the presidential advisers categorically refrained from any political declarations on any sort of political issue.

Other contingency factors are as important, but the Moldovan leaders seem to have lacked the courage to explore them, unlike Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine did during the Iraq crisis. At present, the Russian authorities are amazed at Georgia's partnership with the US, as if they do not know who was the one to encourage separatism on Georgian soil. Thus, in the new regional situation that emerged in the aftermath of the Iraq war, Moldova is the only CIS state where Russia still can be a regional power able to impose its will, which thing Russia will continue to do given the coming presidential and parliamentary elections there.

After so many positive signs and statements by the "main guarantor", the Tiraspol administration simply could not help it. The first thing they did was to take vengeance on the Moldovan authorities for the latter's call upon the EU and the USA to ban entry of Transdnistrian authorities on their territories. The Transdnistrian authorities reacted

by declaring 14 highest Moldovan officials *personae non grata* on Transdnistrian soil. This move had an obviously mocking message, the text of the document reiterating almost literally the text of the Moldovan authorities' letter to the EU and the USA, and its asymmetric nature was a hint to the model of asymmetric federation proposed by President Voronin. Moreover, they overturned a major propaganda act put up by the Chisinau authorities, namely the attendance by President Voronin of the football match between the Moldovan and Dutch teams within the European Championship preliminaries, which took place on a stadium in Transdnistria.

Politics is a practical thing, and President Voronin wanted to attend the match in his quality of "main supporter" of the national team of Moldova, formed by players from both sides of Dniestr. Voronin was prevented from attending, and the administration in Chisinau was shown once over how certain of themselves the leaders in Tiraspol are, despite their statements that the Transdnistrian region is going through an extremely difficult time due to the "economic and diplomatic blockades imposed by Chisinau".

The reasons behind Tiraspol's provocative behaviour clearly stand out: their confidence in Russia's backing.

From this point of view, it seems obvious that the Transdnistrian authorities did not need to promote their own initiative to hold the referendum on land ownership, which they felt they had to launch during a time of great uncertainty for them. The Tiraspol leaders know very well the significance of the issue of land ownership in an authoritarian regime. At the same time, for political and image reasons, it was misplaced to cancel the referendum. Therefore, it seems that the Transdnistrian authorities let it happen "at God's will", so that later they can get the most of its propagandistic character. Hence, what in Chisinau was viewed as the defeat of Transdnistrian leaders could soon bring completely unexpected results.

4. The propagandistic potential of the "lost" referendum

One can suppose that if the Transdnistrian authorities truly wanted the results of the referendum to be validated, they would have taken the necessary efforts, and the participation rate would have been close to the one in the referendum in Chechnya, where almost 96% of the voters showed up for the poll.

Indeed, it is extremely suspect that under extremely difficult economic circumstances the Transdnistrian leaders have engaged in a costly political venture, which, above all, supposedly revealed their lack of control over the public opinion in the region.

Under these circumstances, it is obvious that the results of the referendum bear a huge propagandistic potential for the regional authorities. Firstly, 52% or the absolute majority of citizens who took part in the poll opted for the private ownership of land. Interestingly, the majority of those who took part in the poll were rural inhabitants, who are affected directly by the issue of land ownership. This result could help the authorities, if necessary, to attract investors in the region speculating on the fact that the region is much more advanced and ready for economic reforms than generally thought.

Secondly, it is significant that the Transdnistrian regime created a "democratic" precedent of holding a referendum, which did not endorse their would be proposal. With regional elections in October 2003 in the autonomous entity Gagauz Yeri in the background, and the propaganda methods used by the Moldovan authorities in the current electoral campaign, the Transdnistrian referendum appears as an example of expression of citizens' free will.

Given that in about 10 months we will be called to a referendum to decide the adoption of the Moldovan federal constitution, one can easily understand that the recent Transdnistrian referendum was a "general rehearsal" and that the story with the unexpected outcome of the democratic vote could repeat. Certainly, this could happen if, subject to outside pressure, the Constitutional Board joining representatives of Chisinau and Tiraspol drafts a federal Constitution which the Tiraspol leaders will not like.

For the Transdnistrians to be certain that they can block the adoption of a Constitution that they do not like, it is necessary for the referendums to be held in Moldova and Transdnistria separately.

It seems that things will evolve according to this very scenario. On 4 April 2003 the Moldovan Parliament adopted hastily and with little debate the "Protocol on the establishment of the mechanisms of adoption of the federal Constitution". The Protocol mentions only the fact that "the text of the Constitution will be developed by a joint Moldovan-Transdnistrian Board, which will guarantee full participation to the parties' representatives, and will be observed by experts from the guarantor states (Russia and Ukraine), OSCE and other international observers". The Protocol provides that the referendum on the adoption of the Constitution be held no later than 1 February 2004, and the elections to the Federal bodies before 25 February 2005. Curiously, the Protocol does not include any reference to the principles according to which the federal Constitution is to be elaborated. Even more curious is the fact that the Protocol refers only to the "obligation of the Moldovan and Transdnistrian leaders to guarantee all necessary conditions for the holding of the referendum according to the OSCE and Council of Europe standards", but says nothing of the method of organising it, whether it will be in a single national circumscription or in two circumscriptions, that is in Moldova and Transdnistria separately.

At the same time, on 9 April 2003 the Supreme Soviet in Tiraspol adopted a similar paper, which in its very title specifies that the referendum is about the establishment of a "federation on contractual basis", invoking the Declaration of Intent of 5 December 2002 signed by the guarantor states, the OSCE and Transdnistria, but not Moldova. It is difficult to grasp the meaning that the Tiraspol leaders ascribe to the term "contractual federation". Yet, there is no doubt that they mean the principle of "the equality of parties", which principle would help them argue that the referendum is held separately in the two "equal subjects". Otherwise, this will be a breach of the principle of the "equality of parties", given that the electorate of Moldova is five to six times larger than the Transdnistrian one. Then, if the referendums are held separately, the results of Transdnistrians' "freely expressed vote" could be very similar to the ones registered on 6 April 2003.

The 2003 Electoral Campaign

April 25, 2003

There's one month left until the local elections of 25 May 2003. Practically, most of the practical work of preparation for the elections has already been done. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) has succeeded in persuading the government to allot another 1.9 million Lei in addition to the previously allotted 7.5 million. This addition has been due to the fact that mayors will be elected in the same manner as the local councilors, by direct vote and not indirectly as was previously provided. Thus, the overall budget for the ongoing electoral campaign amounts to 9.4 million Lei. The electoral districts and district electoral councils (in districts, municipalities, towns, villages/communes) have been established in due time, and so have the 1987 precincts and their bureaus.

The CEC has adopted decisions of major importance on the threshold of electoral spending for contestants, the conception and regulation on the coverage of the electoral campaign in the mass media, and on monitoring of elections by local and foreign observers to be accredited by the respective electoral bodies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the sample voting ballots for the election of mayors and councilors of both levels have been approved, and they which differ correspondingly. In all, 898 mayors and 11,843 district, town, municipal, village/commune councilors are to be elected.

At present, one can state that the first stage of the electoral period is over, and that the second one, the electoral campaigns of electoral contestants, has in fact started. 30 days before the election day, the term for registration of contestants for mayors, local and district councilors elapsed. The district councils have one more week to examine the documents submitted for contestants' registration.

Of the 26 political parties registered in Moldova, only 18 have registered to date their electoral symbols to be printed on ballots. Of the 10 parties that created the Centre-Left Union in February 2003 led by the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM), seven have entered the electoral race individually. Other six opposition parties of centre-left and centre-right orientation have formed the electoral bloc Social Liberal Alliance "Our Moldova", led by the Mayor of Chisinau Serafim Urechean. Two other parties of similar orientation have joined in the electoral bloc Social Democratic Party - Social Liberal Party. An important role in the current campaign is being played by People's Christian Democratic Party, which represents the right opposition. They have initially called upon all opposition parties to run as a single opposition bloc, but after this initiative has failed, they refrained from forming any electoral blocs with small opposition parties.

Thus, the ruling party will compete with six potential political partners from the Centre-Left Union and as much as three "oppositions" of various standing, which still have accounts to settle among themselves.

The behaviour of parties in these elections sheds light on the fact that in the Moldovan political party system four major political groupings can be distinguished, which are likely to continue to stand out in the local political arena after the May elections.

Although the Republic of Moldova is experiencing its 7th electoral campaign held in conditions of political pluralism, the issues and major scandals related to the current campaign are prompted by the same factors: the behaviour of the state mass media, the use of the administrative leverage by the contestants and representatives of the ruling CPM, the intimidation of contestants from opposition parties, the obscure funding of electoral contestants' campaign. Each of these factors deserves special monitoring and detailed analysis, which is being done by the CEC, the electoral contestants themselves and a number of non-governmental organisations.

The current local elections have an extremely high political stake, although, theoretically, they should be just "administrative elections".

Firstly, these elections are for the bodies of the local administration system, which recently has been radically changed. There is no doubt that the revision of the local public administration system has been part of the ruling party's efforts at building the "vertical axis of state power". Testimony to this is the insistence with which the current government has promoted this idea by trying to hold early local elections last year, a proposal that was ruled unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court.

Secondly, President Voronin has been involved in the current campaign. During the ceremony of depositing flowers to the monument to Lenin for his 133rd anniversary, Voronin, President of Moldova and Chairman of the CPM, said that "at present, CPM main task is to strengthen the party and keep it in power. The CPM must do everything to win the mayoralty of the capital Chisinau in the local elections scheduled for 25 May 2003". This development has reminded the public opinion of a similar case two years ago when the opposition parties turned to the Constitutional Court to rule on whether holding the office of the President of Moldova is constitutionally compatible with holding the chairmanship of a political party, obviously referring to Voronin's case. The Constitutional Court decided back then that it was not in its competence to rule on that issue. As a result, at present one cannot distinguish when President Vladimir Voronin represents the interests of all Moldovan citizens from when he represents the interests of the party that he's chairing.

It is true that the previous Moldovan Presidents, Mircea Snegur and Petru Lucinschi, got involved in the 1994 and 1998 parliamentary electoral campaigns, when the former supported the Democratic Agrarian Party and the latter - the Bloc for a Democratic and Prosperous Moldova. Moreover, Mircea Snegur even went the length of creating and chairing a political party during his presidential term, and thus set a precedent in the current constitutional setting. Therefore, even though the reproach to the CPM is well founded, it has no effects due to the precedents created by the two former Moldovan Presidents. This is how the foundations for the practice of "transfer of authority" from top public figures to candidates for deputies were laid. Still, the former presidents Snegur and Lucinschi never got involved directly in the electoral campaigns for local authorities, and so President Voronin is a groundbreaker in this sense.

Thirdly, the opposition press itself perceives the current local elections as a major political battle between the "leftovers" of democratic forces and the current ruling party, which is being accused of trying to build an authoritarian regime in Moldova.

Public opinion polls and local analysts have indicated that the highest chances in the electoral battle for the mayor of Chisinau belong to the CPM candidate Vasile Zgardan, currently Minister of Transports and Telecommunications, and Serafim Urechean, incumbent mayor of Chisinau and leader of the electoral bloc Social Liberal Alliance "Our Moldova". The opposition press, which supports the latter, has written that the outcome of Urechean's electoral battle with the communist candidate is crucial for the future of the democratisation process in Moldova. Allegedly, an eventual defeat of the communist candidate would set a precedent of enormous demoralising potential for the communists.

The representatives of the other two opposition parties are of a different opinion. They believe that the two top candidates are equally abusive in that they both make extensive use of the "administrative leverage" they hold, although to various extents. The communist candidate has at his disposal the entire central administration, including the ministry led by him, the State Radio and TV company, the governmental newspapers "Moldova Suverana" (Sovereign Moldova) and "Nezavisimaia Moldova" (Independent Moldova) etc. At the same time, the mayor of Chisinau is being accused of abusing, to the detriment of other electoral candidates, the media services of the municipal concern, which includes the TV station EuroTV, the radio station "Antena C", and the newspaper "Capitala" (The Capital).

Since the political stake of the current local elections is so high, the tools used are up to fit it. At this stage, one can judge about the committed abuses by the nature of complaints that the electoral contestants have filed with the CEC. These refer most often to the abuse by public authorities and their media outlets in trying to manipulate the public opinion and defame Serafim Urechean, who is the main counter-candidate of the communists in Chisinau.

The other counter-candidates in Chisinau are probably counting on some sort of political gain resulting from the fight between the two top candidates. Indeed, the Chisinau Mayor, Serafim Urechean, deserves all support in his resistance to all sort of overt accusations at him. Yet, on the other hand, another part of the opposition parties remember well that in the previous local elections four years ago, Urechean himself abusively enjoyed governmental support, which fact was noted in the CEC decisions of 1999. One may say that Urechean is now the victim of the electoral abuses that he himself once helped embed.

In conclusion, the main characteristics of the electoral process are the following: abuses by those in government and revenge by those who proceed them, from one election to another, over and over again. The specific feature of the current campaign, though, is that the extent of abuses being committed is beyond any limit.

In this sense, there are examples, which can be easily qualified as intimidation by authorities of electoral contestants and the people close to them. This could go as far as arrests of candidates or of their subordinates at work etc.

Confessions made public by high police officers who said that, in this campaign, the Minister of Internal Affairs executes the political order to prevent the current mayor of Chisinau from being re-elected point to the fact that the Republic of Moldova is going through the dirtiest electoral campaign since 1994.

These examples show that the electoral climate in Moldova has considerably deteriorated, which fact has already been indicated by local and foreign observers with regard to the elections for the governor of the Gagauz Yeri autonomous entity. It is extremely sad that such things happen now after both specialised OSCE institutions (ODIHR), throughout years, have considered that to date elections in Moldova have been relatively free and fair, the same being said in the joint declaration of the Presidents Bush and Voronin of December 2002. It happens so that the very public authorities, who in their statements have repeatedly called for efforts to improve Moldova's image externally, are now risking to affect in the most dangerous way the external image of Moldova through their own actions.

Electoral Statistics

12 May 2003

The electoral campaign for the election of local public administrations has stepped into its final stage. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) has published the data on the number of candidates put up by the electoral contestants, who will compete for mandates of mayors and councillors in local (village, town and municipality) and raion (district) councils.

In all, 930 electoral districts have been set up, of which 32 are raion districts, 3 municipal, 51 town, and 844 village. No electoral district has been set up in the secessionist region of Transdnistria. According to the Law on the Territorial and Administrative Organisation of Moldova, in Transdnistria there are 148 localities including two municipalities (Bender and Tiraspol), 9 towns (both including another two localities) and 69 villages (communes including another 64 rural settlements). In all these places, the general local elections of 25 May 2003 will not be held according to the electoral laws of the Republic of Moldova.

The poll is to elect 898 mayors in three municipalities, 51 towns and 844 villages (communes). In addition, 11,935 councillors are to be elected in 32 districts (1,036 councillors), 3 municipalities (113 councillors), 51 towns (1,035 councillors) and 844 villages (9,751 councillors).

For the above positions, 47,256 candidates have been registered. Of these, 3,466 are candidates for mayors: 21 for mayors of the 3 municipalities, 258 for mayors of 51 towns, and 3,187 for mayors of the 844 villages (communes). It appears that about 3.9 candidates compete per mayor seat: 7 per mayor of municipality, 5.1 per mayor of towns and 3.8 per village (commune) mayor.

For councillors, 43,790 candidates are competing: 5,214 candidates for district councils, 857 for municipal councils; 4,616 for town councils; 33,103 for village (commune) councils. Overall, a councillor seat is disputed by an average of 3.7 candidates: approximately 5 candidates compete for district councillors, 7.6 for municipal councillors, 4.5 for town councillors, and 3.4 for village (commune) councillors.

This data shows eloquently the degree of political activism in urban and rural localities of various types.

As for the electoral contestants, of the 26 parties registered with the Ministry of Justice, only 19 take part in this campaign, of which 11 run individually, and the rest within two electoral blocs. The first bloc, "The Social Liberal Alliance "Our Moldova" (SLAOM), is made up of the Liberal Party (LP), the Social Democratic Alliance (SDA) and the Alliance of Independents (AI), which were later joined by the Party of Reform (PR), the Environmental Party "Green Alliance" (EPGA) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The second electoral bloc is made up by the Social Democratic Party and the Social Liberal Party (SDP-SLP). The other electoral contestants are the Democratic Party (DP), the Communist Party (CP), the Democratic Agrarian Party (DAP), the Socialist Party (SP), the People's Christian

Democratic Party (PCDP), the Movement of Professionals "Hope" (MPH), the Socio-political Movement "New Force" (SPMNF), the Party of Socialists (PS), the Republican Socio-political Movement "Equality" (RSPME), the Republican Party (RP) and the Centrist Union (CU).

The table below shows the number of candidates put up for elections by political formations and independent candidates (T - total, r - raion (districts), m - municipalities, t - towns, v - villages, IC - independent candidates):

Contestants	Mayors				Councillors				
	T	m	t	v	T	r	m	t	v
CP	844	3	51	790	11887	1092	119	1096	9580
SLAOM	678	2	37	639	10234	983	111	964	8176
IC	723	6	61	656	821	61	55	128	577
DP	358	1	21	336	6117	709	111	563	4734
PCDP	284	1	33	250	5246	831	83	658	3674
SDP-SLP	262	3	21	238	4093	684	106	464	2839
DAP	132	-	6	126	2248	425	-	192	1631
CU	126	1	13	112	2072	328	35	308	1401
RSPME	22	2	7	13	437	60	64	142	171
MPH	12	-	2	10	197	23	-	31	143
SP	11	-	2	9	245	18	103	27	97
PS	10	-	3	7	116	-	25	20	71
RP	3	2	1	-	68	-	45	23	-
SPMNF	1	-	1	1	9	-	-	-	-
Total	3466	21	258	3187	43790	5214	857	4616	33103

The above table shows relatively well the organisational and electoral potential of Moldovan political forces. Apart from the fact that six out of all registered parties have failed to put up candidates for the upcoming elections, almost as many parties of

those who do take part in elections have a very low organisational and electoral potential.

This fact is very important given the ongoing debates in Moldova on simplifying the political spectre through administrative methods, whereby a political party must show every year that it has at least 5,000 registered members. The ability of taking part in the local elections brings to the foreground criteria of a completely different order, much more democratic, for assessing the potential of political parties. In any case, these criteria should not involve the forced abolishment of weak parties as the provisions mentioned above stipulate.

However, it seems that for the parties to participate in eventual parliamentary elections, there should exist a number of barriers or clear cut criteria for registration for parliamentary elections. These are necessary because in the parliamentary elections all that parties have to do is submit a list of 101 candidates. As a result, approximately 30 percent of votes are lost due to the high electoral threshold.

It is worth mentioning that by the number of candidates the Communist Party has put up for mayors and councillors, it has demonstrated once again that it is the most influential and powerful political force in the. Two years ago, a few months after the communists' absolute victory in the 2001 parliamentary elections, their newspaper "The Communist" wrote that one of the main aims of the party was to attract individuals of professional and moral weight in various Moldovan localities, regardless of their professional profile, whether they were private owners or shared or not communist views. This aim was to be attained to cover the lack of professionals in the CP. Now, one can state that the CP has succeeded to do this. Moreover, there has been a wealth of instances where powerful opposition candidates have been attracted to the communist ranks. There is nothing unusual in the fact that the administrative leverage causes political proselytism.

Likewise, it is worth mentioning that the constitution of electoral blocs, as expected, apart from their positive effects, particularly for the voters, have negative collateral effects for the political forces who set up the blocs. Thus, it often happens that the constituting elements of blocs fight with each other about which candidates to propose for mayors. In most cases this results in splits in the primary organisations of the constituent parties. This very phenomenon was invoked when parties negotiated their joining into electoral blocs for the local elections. From this point of view, it seems that those who argued that it was reasonable to form electoral blocs only when the constituent parties intend to merge or enter into lasting political coalitions after the elections were right.

The electoral process in Moldova as viewed in the context of the local elections of 25 May 2003
23 May 2003

The first electoral reform in Moldova started in 1993 with the adoption of the Law on Parliamentary Elections. The essence of the reform was to change the majoritarian election system to a proportional one. In 1994 a new Law on Local Elections was adopted envisaging the proportional system for the election of councilors at local and county levels. The Law on Referendums was adopted in 1991 and in 1996 was adopted the Law on Presidential Elections.

Since 1994, six election campaigns have been conducted based on the multi-party system. During this time period, electoral laws were modified for various types of elections, as was the Law on Political Parties adopted in 1991. In the opinion of several experts, this legal framework was of relatively good quality, except for the Law on Presidential Elections, which comprised a series of inconsistencies. A lot of problems appeared due to fact that the laws on various types of elections provided for different procedures for establishing electoral bodies, as well as for different electoral procedures, which did not allow for simultaneous conduct of different types of elections and for the voters to get familiar with a single practice of exercising their right to vote. Obviously, it was necessary to standardise all the electoral procedures, or, in other words, to codify them. This was to be done by observing the principles of continuity, transparency, equality of electoral contestants, competence of the electoral bodies, adequately informing citizens, developed within the limits of available resources and materials. The Electoral Code elaborated and adopted in 1997 was aimed at solving the above mentioned problems and abolishing the mistakes and inconsistencies.

One of its innovations was the establishment of a permanent Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and of its functioning principles. The necessity of an institution acting on a permanent basis was dictated by the activities it had to perform between elections. These firstly were related to studying laws and electoral experience, proposing necessary amendments, conducting civic and voter education programs, informing voters, analysing electoral frauds so as to avoid them in the future, verifying voter rolls and updating them based on the data provided by the local public administration etc.

Transparency of the electoral process was considered of special importance. Procedures for ensuring the transparency were envisaged, starting with the procedure of adopting decisions by electoral bodies to observing electoral process and vote tabulation. Thus, the electoral contestants could designate their representatives to electoral bodies of every level, who were entitled to the same rights as other members, except for the right to pass decisions.

In addition, electoral contestants may have trustees to represent their interests in relations with other parties, and on election day they may accredit observers to monitor all the electoral procedures, from the opening of the polling stations to completing records and sending all the electoral documents to higher level electoral bodies. These provisions motivate electoral contestants to observe the electoral

process and to a great extent make them responsible for the possible disadvantages as compared to other candidates.

Practically, in all the previous electoral campaigns issues related to election financing and coverage in mass media and to the use of administrative leverage by high rank officials running in elections were the most difficult to deal with. It became obvious that ruling parties were not very interested in developing these items. These procedures were not clearly defined in the Electoral Code. It was preferred to award the CEC with the right to establish the procedure of solving these problems via special resolutions and regulations. Only the basic principle was established - ensuring equality of all the candidates. Experience acquired in the previous years shows that CEC regulations on these issues often contain provisions only on the limit of credits allotted by the state for the candidate, the way of reimbursing them and the amount of airtime granted free of charge and for a fee. The CEC is the one to control how these provisions are observed. In addition, the CEC is assisted by the Co-ordinating Council of Audio-visual and Court of Accounts. It is extremely difficult to find criteria and ways of quantifying and controlling the solution for such kind of problems. This is especially true in the case of state officials using public assets available to them for electioneering, as well as for covering in state mass media their professional activities during electoral campaign. An illustration of this is the way state mass media during electoral campaign cover high-ranking officials' **working visits** and the way they take part in various inaugurations of socio-cultural and charity institutions.

Currently, one of the most difficult electoral problems is considered to be the Liaison between voters and those whom they elect (this is especially true of the Gagauz Yeri autonomous entity). Some politicians and experts claim that the proportional election system seriously distorts this liaison. They insist that the current election system favours collective irresponsibility of all the deputies elected based on the party candidate lists and who are not answerable to the voters. That is why, the necessity of changing the incumbent election system is insistently claimed. Last year, some proposals to return to majoritarian election system as well as compromise proposals to introduce a mixed election system (parallel) were put forward. Still, all these proposals have been ignored by the political elite represented in Parliament. On the contrary, all recent amendments of the electoral law point to the obvious desire of the current legislators to conserve the current electoral system and to restrict the access of other politicians to the electoral race.

Such a behaviour of the ruling political elite represented in Parliament is dictated by electoral statistics conducted during the six previous electoral campaigns. Simple arithmetic shows that the high electoral threshold advantages the ruling party. Full proportional system with closed candidates lists, as well as problems related to the procedure of financing political parties represented in Parliament, encourage the party oligarchy. Splits within the political parties, non-transparent compiling of candidate closed lists, which are more like auctions, voluntary change of the candidate's order in the lists only several days prior to elections etc. indicate the oligarchic character of the main Moldovan parties.

It is worth mentioning that in the last ten years no new political leaders have emerged on the Moldovan political scene that could seriously compete with the old elite. To a great extent, this is due to the electoral system, which is employed, and **to obstacles** set by political leaders represented in Parliament to their rivals. Thus, until recently, independent candidates had to pass 4% electoral threshold, the same threshold as for political parties and electoral blocs. In March 2000, this threshold was decreased for independent candidates to 3%, although it is well known from the previous experience that independent candidates can barely pass 1%.

After the Communist Party came to power in 2001, the threshold was increased again. For parties, the threshold increased from 4% to 6%. For electoral blocs formed by 2 parties, the threshold is 9%, for blocs formed by 3 and more parties, it is 12%.

Another example is related to the modifications introduced in the 1998 Law on Political Parties and Other Socio-political Organisations. In compliance with those modifications, the number of members required for party registration was randomly increased from 300 to 5,000, regardless of the fact that in order to include 5,000 members political movements should be able to promote their ideas among their would-be members. The result of this "political spectre cleaning" act is that beginning with 1999 the number of political parties was reduced, from 60 to 25, whereas the number of the electoral contestants in the campaigns to follow did not decrease. On the contrary, the problem of party members' signature verification occurred, which resulted in a series of litigation pending resolution. Last year, the ruling party inserted modification in the law on political parties obliging them to demonstrate every year that they have at least 5,000 members. These two problems pushed last year the parliamentary opposition to initiate a referendum for changing the electoral system to a mixed or parallel one, but it was blocked by the ruling party, though it was the Communist party that promised in the election campaign in 2001 to change the electoral legislation in order to make it more democratic. And the second problem was that practically all political parties started in February this a year a protest action against changing the Law on Political Parties. Another problem is that the reports of local observers who provided the monitoring of the early elections of Governor of Gagauz Yeri autonomy demonstrated that the electoral climate in Moldova has deteriorated dramatically, the abuse of the administrative leverage overpass all imaginable limits.

Needles to say, the ruling party and the opposition were in a deep conflict after the former first declared their intention to modify the law on local public administration and the administrative division of the territory of the country in order to build the so called vertical power axes in the state, which means to make local public administration bodies dependent on central power. In this respect, the ruling party intended to organise in April last year early general elections, but the opposition contested this decision in the Constitutional Court, which declared it illegal. One of the main opponent of the intention of ruling party to revise the local public administration system was the Chisinau mayor Serafim Urechean, who is also the leader of the non-governmental organisation the Association of Local and Regional Powers of Moldova. As far as I can judge, Urechean was very active in building relations with the Congress of Local and Regional powers of the Council of Europe in an attempt to demonstrate that the proposal to revise the local public administration

system is a huge mistake. Possibly this has made him the main enemy of the ruling party.

The ruling party hopes that the local election more generally will strengthen their hand by bringing the local administration under their centralised control. The local election will be the first held under the system of local administration introduced by the Communist Party, which replaces the 10 existing counties (*judete*) with 33 districts (*raioane*). This reform has been criticised by international financial institutions and the Council of Europe, as well as by the communists' domestic opponents. To justify their position, the communist leaders have relied on several arguments. They have pointed to the overwhelming mandate that their platform-which included local administration reform-received in the February 2001 parliamentary elections. They have also suggested that the reduction in administrative staff would lead to reduced expenditure; that the reforms would help to fight corruption at local level; and that the proposed system would offer better services by bringing local officials closer to citizens.

The Communist Party's opponents (and many international critics) have rejected these claims, arguing that the reforms initiated by the CPM represent a step backward in the development of sustainable regions in Moldova. They see no reason to assume that a three-fold reduction in the size of territorial-administrative entities will help eliminate abuses by local officers, or that the efficiency of local government services would improve. They also consider it unlikely that an increase in the number of administrative units will contribute to the reduction of administrative staff. The experience at the national level-where the CPM had similarly promised to reduce staff but where numbers of personnel, departments and ministries keep rising-does not appear promising.

The right-wing opposition in Moldova has been particularly critical of the communists' local administration reforms. From their perspective, the communists have sought to bring local public administrations under the control of the central authorities in order to prevent local governments from turning into self-sufficient entities. According to the opposition, the communist leadership is furthermore motivated by the additional goal of bringing the country's territorial-administrative organisation in line with the structure of the communists' own regional branches. Organisationally, the Communist Party structure is based on the old territorial division that had existed in Moldova prior to the last round of reforms carried out by the centre-right government back in 1999. By undoing the centre-right's reforms, the Communist Party leadership would be in a position to reward party officials and activists by promoting them to posts in the public administrative structures. Finally, opponents of the recent reforms argue that the communists have significantly understated the costs connected with local-level restructuring. Local government experts have suggested that the total cost involved will be ten times higher than the government's estimate. Concerns over the budgetary implications of the proposed reforms have already complicated relations with international financial institutions.

Another problem of concern is that last year the Governor of Gagauz yeri autonomy was publicly accused by the President of the country that he is a thief and pressed him to resign. Later though, the former Gagauz Governor was appointed as Moldovan Ambassador to Switzerland. So, it appears that he was not really a thief. Of course,

corruption proliferates in Moldova and this creates an atmosphere of general suspicion. That's why when in the election campaign some candidates or accused and arrested one never knows what to think about it. The problem is that other high rank officials (former ministers of economy, minister of transport) were accused publicly of criminal offences just to force them to give up their posts and then they were awarded other high rank positions. This demonstrates that in a country like Moldova the harassment of the candidates could be just a method to force political opponents to give up running for elections.

The above said proves that electoral climate in Moldova is very confused.

During the election campaign, questions have emerged over the fairness of coverage in the state mass media, the abuse of administrative leverage by representatives of the ruling party, the intimidation of contestants from opposition groups, and a lack of transparency in campaign financing. Allegations against the authorities have centred on instances of intimidation directed against electoral contestants and their activists, as well as reports from police officers suggesting that high-ranking government officials have given orders that Mr Urechean's re-election as mayor of Chisinau be prevented.

These allegations highlight the extent to which the CPM looks to the local election to help it to consolidate its hold on power-having already won control of the parliament, cabinet and presidency in early 2001. The opposition, for its part, is taking the local election no less seriously than the CPM, in an effort to bounce back from its resounding defeat in the parliamentary election two years ago. The opposition has now sought to frame the local election as a major political battle between what is left of Moldova's democratic forces and a ruling party intent on building up an authoritarian regime.

The opposition has placed particular emphasis on retaining control of the mayor's office in Chisinau. The contest for the mayorship of the capital city is seen as key, as Chisinau is by far the most important urban centre and a major source of revenue. The Chisinau mayoral race pits Mr Urechean, the incumbent General Mayor and Head of the Electoral Bloc Social Liberal Alliance "Our Moldova", against the communists' candidate, Vasile Zgardan, currently the Minister of Transports and Telecommunications. Mr Urechean's supporters in the opposition press have portrayed his victory as vital for the future of Moldovan democracy and a prime opportunity to demoralise the Communist Party. The rest of the opposition views the situation less starkly, and argues that both top candidates have abused in equal measure the "administrative leverage", to which they both have access. Although most of the complaints filed with the central election commission (CEC) to date have centred on alleged abuses by pro-Communist Party state officials and their media outlets, Mr Urechean is hardly blameless. He set a poor precedent during his own controversial victory in the last local election in 1999, when the CEC criticised him for capitalising on the support of the centre-right government in power at the time. The scale of abuses during the current campaign nevertheless appears more significant than in 1999, and possibly more worrisome than in any nation-wide election since 1994.

By nominating Mr Zgardan-a relatively unknown figure-as the Communist Party choice in the race to run Chisinau, the ruling party has entered a gamble. Mr Zgardan, who serves in the cabinet, has almost no public political profile and is not even a member of the Communist Party. Moreover, in the past he had been part of the Party of Rebirth and Revival led by Mircea Snegur, a former Moldova president with an anti-Communist reputation. The president of the country who insisted on Zgardan candidature is likely to have calculated that a victory by Mr Zgardan, who can only win as a result of his support, would turn into a Chisinau mayor indebted to the current presidential administration. That somewhat explains why this campaign against other candidates is so dirty.

Local elections - preliminary conclusions

28 May 2003

It appears that the current campaign for the general local elections of 25 May 2003 has differed dramatically from the previous seven electoral campaigns held in Moldova after its declaration of independence in 1991.

First should be mentioned the fact that this has been the first electoral campaign held under a communist government. Secondly, this campaign has been qualified by many analysts and observers as the dirtiest ever. Thirdly, this campaign has resulted in the lowest voter turnout. Lastly, in this campaign, the ruling party has received fewer votes than in the preceding parliamentary elections.

One cannot argue for certain that there is a cause-effect relationship among these for factual characteristics of the current campaign. However, one may not underestimate the fact that the turnout rate is a highly strong indicator of citizens' attitude towards government in Moldova. Beyond all doubt, there is a correlation between how the electoral campaign has been conducted and the voter participation rate. The experience of many states has shown that the dirtier and more repressive an electoral campaign is, the lowest the participation rate. Therefore, it has come as no surprise that for the first time in the electoral history of the Republic of Moldova a meagre 57.8 percent of voters showed up to cast their votes. This is a negative signal for the current government. All the more so as the turnout should have been quite high if the territorial administrative reform, which is about to start, had been indeed as much supported by the citizens as the current government has constantly claimed.

It appears, though, that the low voter turnout could be interpreted as a protest against the dirty methods of the state mass media intent on discrediting the electoral contestants, as much as it is an indicator of people's indifference towards the government's proposal to build the "vertical axis of power", which is likely to turn out costly and futile. For the sake of comparison, we would like to remind that in the local elections of 1995 and 1999 turnout neared 60 percent. It is true that in local elections participation is almost 15 percent lower than in parliamentary ones.

To grasp the importance of the results of these elections as compared to the previous ones, one needs to bear in mind the fact that Moldova has gone through only three electoral cycles since it declared independence in 1991. A sound statistical basis is therefore missing. Still, it is worth having a look at the returns of previous polls. Also, we should be wary of the risk that errors might happen when the returns of parliamentary elections are being compared with those of local elections at county or district levels.

In 1995, the Democratic Agrarian Party (DAP) in government at the time received at district level a number of votes (50.1 percent) which was almost 7 percent higher than that in the 1994 parliamentary elections (43.2 percent). In the same context, one can observe that the constituent parts of the Alliance for Democracy and Reforms (ADR), while in government in 1999, received in the 1999 local elections at the county level a percentage of votes (48.7) which was about 2 percent higher than the percentage they got in the 1998 parliamentary scrutiny (46.4). In general terms, one can therefore

observe that in local elections the ruling party or coalition always gets more votes than in the preceding parliamentary elections. The most plausible explanation of this phenomenon could be that in the one-year interval between the parliamentary and local elections, during which the winners of the former govern, the political life continues to be under the hold and prevalence of the expectations that the voters had formed during the said parliamentary elections. As for the opposition parties, it should be noted that the front liners in parliamentary elections were basically retaining their rating in the successive local elections.

This phenomenon is well known both to the current ruling party and the opposition parties. In this sense, it is not by chance that the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM) wanted to hold early local elections in 2002, exactly one year after they took to power following the parliamentary elections of early 2001. Is not by chance either that the opposition had objected to holding early elections and insisted that they be held ordinarily in 2003, after the four- year mandates of local elected officers expired.

The preliminary results of this campaign, held two years after the parliamentary elections, reveal a slight decrease of about 2 percent in the CPM vote returns at district level. While this decrease should not be overestimated, it is still a clear indicator to the fact that the CPM is about to slide into a stagnation crisis, which might be followed by recession.

In the competition for mayor offices, the CPM scored best in the first round of elections with more than 25 percent of Moldova mayoralities being won over by them. However, the CPM might encounter serious problems in promoting its candidates in the second round. The problem is that the arrogant behaviour of the CPM in this campaign has left them without any potential political allies in the so-called Centre-Left Union set up in February 2003. It is so that the CPM has remained without any political allies who would encourage their voters to vote for the CPM in the second round.

There is a chance that the CPM might now try to revive the Centre-Left Union. At least one component thereof - the Democratic Party (DP), registered a very good return of 8 percent. The almost 2 percent received by the DAP is not to be overlooked either, as in certain districts these two parties scored unexpectedly high.

By all probabilities the DP will not make any public statements in this sense in order not to damage its political field of manoeuvre. As for the DAP, one can assume that the CPM does not even need to make a public commitment, as the political programmes of the two parties are very close anyway. A public declaration by the DAP calling on its voters to vote for the communists in the second round would rather damage the CPM. This has already happen in 1999 when the CPM and DAP set up a partnership and even a joint electoral bloc. Later on, though, that coalition proved damaging for the CPM, given that during the earlier DAP government more than 60% of Moldova's foreign debt had been accumulated and that a large part of the CPM propaganda message had been blaming the previous so-called "democratic" governments who subdued the country to foreign creditors. Therefore, one can expect that the final percentage of elected mayors on behalf of the CPM correlates with the percentage of CPM candidates elected to district councils, i.e. is around the symbolic threshold of 50 percent.

As for the battle for the Chisinau municipality, one can observe that support for the CPM has declined in Chisinau more than in the rest of the country. The fact that Vasile Zgardan, the CPM candidate, was supported personally by President Voronin, who is also the Chairman of the CPM, has been interpreted by many journalists as a personal defeat of the latter. It is an enormous defeat given that practically the entire state mass media, both the electronic and the written ones, engaged in a persistent campaign of denigration of electoral contestants, especially of Serafim Urechean, the incumbent General Mayor. The OSCE and the Council of Europe observers have drawn attention to this fact in their preliminary statement of findings.

Although the independent candidate, Serafim Urechean (44%), came ahead of the communist candidate Vasile Zgardan (41%) in the first round, one can hardly make any reliable forecasts at the moment with regard to their performance in the second round.

There are a number of factors that give advantage to Serafim Urechean. Firstly, the voters in the Chisinau municipality are relatively educated and those who have voted for democratic candidates such as Vlad Cubreacov and Viorel Topa and who account for around 10% of votes in the first round, would rather vote for Serafim Urechean in the second round.

Secondly, it could happen so that the media pressure exercised by the electronic and written state media considerably diminishes after the OSCE and Council of Europe observers expressed their concern about the deterioration of the electoral climate in Moldova.

Thirdly, Serafim Urechean might insist that televised public debates are organised featuring him and his counter-candidate, Vasile Zgardan, where he could show that he is much more knowledgeable of the state of affairs in the municipality. Of course, Urechean would prevail in such debates only if the moderation of the show is equidistant. At the same time, it would be to the disadvantage of Vasile Zgardan to refuse to attend such debates as this would make him appear eluding to engage in a direct dialogue with the voters.

The advantages that Vasile Zgardan might have over Urechean mainly reside in the fact that the CPM has an extremely disciplined electorate, unlike the electorate of democratic parties, which could simply forget attending the second round of the local elections.

It is interesting to note that the CPM has shown unhappy with the results of the election in the Chisinau municipality. A certain anxiety could be read in the fact that the CPM has requested a court of justice to rule that all ballots originating in the municipality be re-counted manually. If the recount confirms the already announced results, it would be extremely encouraging for the lead candidate Serafim Urechean and extremely embarrassing for the communist candidate Vasile Zgardan. However, if the recount reveals significant mistakes, the advantaged one will be Vasile Zgardan.

The Discontent of the Victorious

24 June 2003

More than two weeks have elapsed since the end of the local elections. However, it is still not possible to make a complex analysis of the results because the final, complete results have not been published yet. As a rule, after the mandates of the local elected officers are validated, it takes about two to three months for the complete results of elections to be published. At present, all that has been published is general data on the results of the voting and the number of councillor and mayor mandates won by the electoral contestants at district (municipal) and town (commune) levels.

Although the elections are over, the combatant spirits of some electoral contestants have not calmed down yet. On 19 June 2003 the mandates of the councillors and the general mayor, elected in the Chisinau Municipality on 25 May and 8 June respectively, were validated. However, the relevant decision of the court has been disputed. In a series of electoral districts there have been attempts and even actual appeals against the results of elections for mayors before their mandates are validated by the district courts.

Although in its public statements the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM) has tried to appear victorious and totally happy with the results of the elections, their behaviour has been evidence to the contrary.

The biggest curiosity is that the results have been and continue to be disputed practically exclusively by the CPM, which has ruled for three years, during which time the CPM has managed to build the so-called "vertical axis of state power". This is the most eloquent indicator that our rulers are not happy with the results of the elections and would like to revise them and at the same time verify how well the mechanism of "vertical power axis" that they have created works. In particular, it seems that they want to test how loyal the justice is to the ruling party following the reform of the judicial system.

Generally speaking, the behaviour of the CPM is not at all surprising. During the electoral campaign most complaints were filed by the CPM. It was their resource to justice following the first round of the elections in the Chisinau Municipality, which claimed a check of all voting ballots and electoral documents, that started to worry some analysts. Judging by the abusive way in which the electoral campaign had unfolded, the analysts assumed that the CPM wanted victory at any price.

The problem is that the irregularities invoked by the CPM are exactly the same as those that the OSCE observation missions to Moldova have been constantly mentioning in their reports since 1994 and which have been judged not to have affected the final results of elections in any significant way. In fact, these refer to the incorrect compilation of voter lists, the "family vote" that breaches the secrecy of the vote and other violations of this sort. It is curious that it was the Department for Information Technologies at the Ministry of Internal Affairs that was responsible for providing support to the local public administrations to compile the voter lists correctly, which thing is confirmed by the contract that the Central Electoral Commission had signed with the Department. Secondly, the state TV channel

behaved abusively in the campaign of denigration of the opponents of the ruling party instead of providing voter education. In addition, what can one expect of the volunteers, employees of electoral offices, of which only 1 or 2 were remunerated and the other 6-10 were only paid on the election day as much as about US\$3.

Certainly, all these factors may not serve as excuses for the committed errors. What is certain, though, is that such irregularities may not influence the results of elections. At least there has been no evidence to demonstrate that the violation of technical procedures has influenced the results of the election in any district. If things were different, then the CPM victory in the 2001 parliamentary elections would have been contested by its opponents for the violations signalled in those elections were exactly the same as the ones that the CPM is complaining about now. To see this we only need to have a look at the OSCE observation reports.

The CPM actions of contesting elections in the districts where they wanted to win but failed could have the effect of Pandora's box. The representatives of the opposition could approach the courts to contest the results of elections in the districts where the CPM won and ask that the constitutional principle of uniform application of laws in Moldova be respected. This is a sure way towards the destabilisation of the political situation in Moldova.

Another indicator to the discontent of the rulers with the election results is the effort of the state media to justify the abuses that it committed during the campaign, but which failed to bring about the victory of the communist candidate for the position of general mayor of Chisinau.

In this sense, observers have noted two significant things. Firstly, the threatening tone that the state mass media has adopted towards the citizens in the districts where the CPM have lost elections. These have been suggested that they might encounter problems because the political colour of the local power is different from that of the ruling party and this could manifest negatively upon the formation of local budgets. Secondly, in his post-election address to the citizens, President Voronin actually warned the mayor of Chisinau that he would have serious problems while executing his mandate. As significant is the remark by President Voronin that the difference of votes that ensured the victory of the current mayor is not so significant and so his activity will be under the supervision of central authorities.

The municipal press that supported the mayor of Chisinau during the electoral campaign reacted sarcastically to the events that revealed the discontent of the rulers, and wrote: "those who do not know how to organise a fair campaign, do not know how to lose with dignity either". Indeed, the difference in the votes received by the current mayor of Chisinau and his communist rival candidate is of 7.8% (53.9% to 46,1%). At the same time, the absolute victory that the CPM won in the 2001 parliamentary elections was of 50.07%. Normally, that result would not have been sufficient for a vote of confidence to the Government, more so for the election of the President or a constitutional majority of the CPM in the Parliament. Nonetheless, due to the faulty electoral system, the CPM won 40% extra mandates at the account of the democratic parties that failed to pass the 6% electoral threshold. This has ensured the CPM's comfortable governing with a constitutional majority. Obviously, under such

circumstances, the CPM should have considered the interests of the opposition and respected fully the legal norms, but they have avoided to do so.

In this sense, the most curious thing is one of the points that President Voronin made in his post-election statement and namely that "as President of the country" he had called upon the citizens to vote against the communist candidate's rival for the mayoralty of Chisinau. Article 77 of the Constitution stipulates that "the President of Moldova represents the state". Thus, it appears that the very Moldovan State, through its supreme representative, called against one of its citizens who was running for a public office. Or, the Electoral Code, in its preamble, stipulates that "the state guarantees the expression of the free will of citizens through the respect for democratic principles and the norms of the electoral law". Things get even more interesting if we note that this happened after the CEC representatives had tried to reject the complaints of other electoral contestants about the involvement of the President of the country in the electoral campaign on the side of the communist candidates by invoking the right of the citizen Vladimir Voronin to electioneer as any other Moldovan citizen would. This was a weak argument, unable to calm down the plaintiffs, given that not any Moldovan citizen has unlimited access to the public audio-visual bodies to electioneer as the citizen Vladimir Voronin had.

There is still another factor that reveals the reasons for the CPM discontent with the election results. Thus, on the one hand, the election results show that the CPM received 48% at district level, 45% at village and town levels, and 41% of the mayor seats. For comparison, we would like to remind that in 1995 the Democratic Agrarian Party, in government at the time, received over 50% of votes at district and village/town levels and over 60% of mayor mandates. Curiously, one of the CPM leaders has publicly stated that in the 2003 campaign the opinion polls commissioned by the CPM showed a 60% victory for the CPM. Those who conducted the polls have proved wrong in the long run and have dispelled some vain expectations that they themselves had raised.

Apart from these statistic data, the CPM representatives have all the reasons to be unhappy with the election results. Probably, the results that they have obtained do not seem to be sufficient enough to build a sound foundation for the "vertical axis of power", more so since the CPM has made considerable efforts and unjustified sacrifices. Firstly, the CPM has engaged in the extremely costly revision of the local public administration system and the territorial organisation of Moldova, which move has undermined the relations between the Moldovan Government and the World Bank and the IMF. Secondly, the rulers have damaged significantly the favourable image of Moldova that she has earned over years due to the fair and free method in which the previous electoral campaigns were conducted.