

Viewing cable 09CHISINAU575, LUPU DEFECTION FROM COMMUNISTS CREATES

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SUBJECT: LUPU DEFECTION FROM COMMUNISTS CREATES
NEW CENTER IN MOLDOVAN POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Classified by: Ambassador Asif J. Chaudhry for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The departure of former Parliamentary Speaker Marian Lupu from the Party of Communists (PCRM) on June 10 has transformed the deeply-divided Moldovan political map by introducing a new political center. Immediately following Lupu's announcement, the Ambassador met with key political party leaders to hear their opinions on the upcoming repeat parliamentary elections and the political developments surrounding Lupu's defection. Some expressed doubts about whether Lupu's defection was sincere or a "Communist project." Interlocutors concurred that the key test would be whether Lupu later voted with the Communists or the opposition when the new parliament convened after the July 29 repeat elections.

¶2. (C) Though there was an initial scramble to see whether Lupu would be able to unite either the entire opposition, or at least the centrist parties, in the end egos and political differences prevailed and Lupu ended up taking over the electoral list of Dumitru Diacov's Democratic Party. The three main opposition parties (Liberal

Party - PL, Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova - PDLM and Our Moldova Alliance - AMN) later made an attempt to unite on a single list, which also failed. Moldova now stands poised for July 29 elections facing the likely scenario that no party will win enough votes to elect a president and that a coalition will be needed in order to put together a new government. If such coalition were to fail, President Voronin would continue on as a limping (but not fully lame) duck president until new parliamentary elections could be held in 2010. End Summary.

Lupu's Defection from PCRM Changes Political Spectrum

¶3. (C) Following the two failed attempts by the Parliament elected April 5 to provide the 60 percent majority of votes needed to choose a president (May 20 and June 4), it was clear that repeat parliamentary elections would be required. On June 10, former Parliamentary Speaker Marian Lupu delivered his stunning announcement that he was leaving the Party of Communists. Lupu quickly came to an agreement with Dumitru Diacov that he would take over the Democratic Party's electoral list and use this established party as the vehicle for his campaign platform. Lupu's defection has created a new electoral force to occupy a centrist position, establishing a third alternative to the two opposing poles, of PCRM vs. opposition parties. Following Lupu's defection, Ambassador (accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief) met immediately and repeatedly with the range of party leaders (Urechean, Ghimpu, Diacov, Filat, Bragis, and Lupu) to discuss the shifting political picture in Moldova.

Was Lupu's Defection Sincere or a Communist Project?

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¶4. (C) The opposition leaders expressed some uncertainties and doubts about Lupu's sincerity and his motives. Urechean said (6/10) that he was not sure if Lupu's defection was sincere, or if it was "a Voronin project." Liberal Party Leader Mihai Ghimpu also expressed some doubts (6/11), but said optimistically, that if Lupu had sincerely left the Communists, then there was now a new light of hope that things could change in Moldova. Ghimpu took some credit for this turn of events, saying that if the opposition had voted along with the Communists and selected a president, then Lupu would have stayed there too, and nothing would have changed.

¶5. (C) All interlocutors noted that the key test would be determined by whether Lupu joined up with the Communists or the Opposition in the new

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parliament after the repeat elections. Urechean believed that if Lupu made it into the parliament, he might end up joining with the Communists, a scenario that was actually ideal for Voronin. On the other hand, Urechean speculated that if Lupu were able to unite all the Social Democrats together, such unity would be good for Moldova's democratic development.

Lupu's Search for his Best Campaign Vehicle

¶6. (C) In the days before Lupu's announcement that he would lead the list of Diacov's Democratic Party, opposition leaders met repeatedly with each other and with Lupu. All were involved in trying to determine whether a common list would be possible, while Lupu was also negotiating to resolve the question of which list to run on. Diacov confirmed that on June 10 he had met with Filat and Urechean. He said that he had tried to convince them not to be too aggressive about Lupu leaving the PCRM, and to stop suggesting that Lupu's leaving the party was a project of the PCRM. Filat confirmed on June 10 that he was reaching out to Lupu and had also met with Diacov and Braghis.

¶7. (C) Diacov explained how he had offered Lupu the chairmanship of the party. He said that initially Filat had wanted Diacov to join his (Filat's) party, but nothing worked out between them. Diacov confided that he believed the real problem was between Filat and Lupu -- Filat would not accept having anyone else as number one, and hence preferred to run on his own ticket. Diacov noted that unfortunately he did not manage to get a common position with Braghis. Diacov told Ambassador that he objectively believed that Lupu was the most suitable person in Moldova for the post of president.

¶8. (C) Lupu confided to Ambassador on June 14 that he had carefully considered his options. He had systematically talked to Urechean, Filat, Diacov and Braghis. There were also two completely unknown parties that had offered him the chance to take over, and build the party structure himself. These two unknown parties were Moldova Unita (United Moldova) headed by Ana Taciuc and Forta Noua (New Force) headed by former Minister of Defense Valeriu Plesca. Lupu feared that Moldova Unita was backed by the FSB, and was concerned

that Forta Noua was nothing more than Plesca himself. Lupu reported that his best discussions were with Diacov, and in the end he decided that Diacov offered him the best party structure to work with.

Opposition Attempts to form a Joint List

¶9. (C) In early July, days before the deadline for finalizing candidate lists, the three opposition parties PDLM, PL and AMN made a last attempt to form a joint list. Liberal Party leader and Chisinau Mayor Dorin Chirtoaca told the Ambassador that Filat had approached him urging that the parties run together. Objective observers suggested that if the parties could run together with a unified message, they would be much stronger and might possibly win enough support to form a government. A Party Congress of the Liberal Party met on Saturday July 4, attended by 54 members of the Central Committee, and voted almost unanimously in favor of running on a joint list. As Filat was pushing for a joint list and Urechean was apparently on board, it appeared possible that these parties might actually come together for the elections.

¶10. (C) Apparently egos did not allow the parties to resolve the sticky questions of which party's list the three would run on, or who would head the list. The three parties did not succeed in forming a joint list. Filat later told the Ambassador that he was angry that he had lost the first twelve days of the official electoral campaign with his back and forth discussions with the PL and AMN leaders. Filat claimed he had

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even willing agree to running on the Liberal Party list, and even to let Chirtoaca run as number one, but the initiative hQ nonetheless failed. Filat blamed AMN leader Urechean for the failure to run together, telling us that Urechean had agreed at first, and then backed down.

No Party to Win the Golden Majority

¶11. (C) Looking ahead to likely results of the elections, it appears that the Party of Communists will have a poorer showing July 29 than they did on April 5. Urechean told us he was quite sure that the Communists would do worse in the repeat elections, and predicted a drop of some 10-15 percent, resulting in not more than 49-50 seats altogether -- not even enough to elect a Speaker. As Parliament could not be dissolved a second time

in the same year, it would thus be necessary for the parties to reach an arrangement in the new parliament.

¶12. (C) Ghimpu predicted that Lupu could draw some 5-10% away from the PCRM. Ghimpu explained that the PCRM controls a certain niche that no one would remove, suggesting that there were several categories of voters for the PCRM: (1) those who support the PCRM regardless of the standard of living; (2) those who got their jobs from the PCRM (and would be dismissed if other parties came to power); and (3) the Russian-speaking electorate. On the other hand there were in the PCRM people who had voted for Lupu, some of whom would now follow him to the Democratic Party.

¶13. (C) Diacov was quite confident that with Lupu on this party's ticket, the Democratic Party would be successful in winning a place in the new parliament. At the most pessimistic, he predicted a 10 percent showing, though he thought 15-20 percent was more optimistic, and that 10-15 percent was a realistic estimate.

Comment

¶14. (C) At this point, Embassy believes it most likely that neither the PCRM nor the PL/PLDM/AMN opposition pole will win enough votes to elect the president after the elections. It is possible that, as they did in the last elections, the PCRM will once again win enough seats to select a speaker (51), but not enough to elect the president (61). On the other hand, according to early polling data, it is also likely that the PCRM may fail even to win the speaker's majority. In such a case, the PCRM would be forced to seek a coalition partner. It appears Lupu would likely have enough votes to be the "kingmaker." While it is theoretically possible that the PCRM might seek coalition with Filat or Urechean, it is more likely that it will either have to make a coalition with Lupu, or fail to put a new government in place. If so, Voronin would continue on as a limping (not fully lame) duck President until repeat parliamentary elections could be held in 2010. While such a scenario might suit Voronin, if he truly desires to hang on to the presidency, prolonging the state of electoral uncertainties would be disastrous for Moldova in the current economic times. Moldova needs to get a new government in place, start negotiations with the IMF for a new agreement, and get on with the business of running the country.

CHAUDHRY