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MOLDOVA'S FOREIGN POLICY STATEWATCH

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INFLUENCE OF ETHNIC MINORITIES ON STATE'S FOREIGN POLICY

**NEXT TOPIC
TO BE COVERED:**

**How to support
Moldovan diaspora
in Italy?**

The problem of Moldova's geopolitical identity continues to be, after 20 years of independence, a topic still open for Moldovan society. This situation can be explained by the polarization of Moldovan society that often has been divided by geopolitical preferences of the citizens of this state. Polarization phenomenon was intentionally powered on different occasions by certain political parties invoking false threats to obtain political dividends from parliamentary elections. Attitude of ethnic minorities towards political issues and international institutions is an important element in influencing foreign policy of Moldova. In other words, in most cases, political parties articulate their policies and their implementation tools based on voters preferences.

Moldova's Foreign Policy Statewatch represents a series of brief analyses, written by local and foreign experts, dedicated to the most topical subjects related to the foreign policy of Moldova, major developments in the Black Sea Region, cooperation with international organizations and peace building activities in the region. It aims to create a common platform for discussion and to bring together experts, commentators, officials and diplomats who are concerned with the perspectives of European Integration of Moldova. It is also pertaining to offer to Moldova's diplomats and analysts a valuable tribune for debating the most interesting and controversial points of view that could help Moldova to find its path to EU.

Political options of ethnic minorities from Moldova

The census of 2004 shows that ethnic minorities constitute about 22% of Moldova population (the census does not take into account the demographic situation in Bender and municipalities from the left bank of Nistru river) of which 8,4% are Ukrainians, Russians – 5,9%, Gagauz - 4,4¹ etc. Even if ethnic structure

¹ Population census of 2004, www.statistica.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=295&id=2234#idc=205&

of minorities is rather heterogeneous, however, representatives of these categories have practically a similar behavior in relation to the foreign policy of the state, so we will treat everyone as a common group. Both Ukrainians and Gagauz manifest a pronounced pro-Russian attitude and support leftist parties that express interests of ethnic minorities. Communist party has obtained, according to exit polls from the last parliamentary elections of 28 November 2010, the support of more than 60% expressed by each ethnic minority group as a part, and in the 2009 elections PCRM result was over 73% among Russians and over 80% among Ukrainians.²

We are far from exaggerating the influence of ethnic factor on the choices of political parties in foreign policy and security, but the results of all parliamentary elections in Moldova show certain tendencies in the behavior of ethnic minorities. In other words, talking about ethnic minorities, there is a direct relationship between their request and electoral offer on the left segment of political spectrum. This explains in a way the fact that in Moldova there were no established parties on ethnic criteria.

Regarding foreign policy, priorities of this category of citizens is limited, largely, to deep integration in CIS, maintaining military neutrality of the state, and the Russian Federation should be the main strategic partner of Moldova. For example, PCRM launched at parliamentary elections in 2001, where it obtained 71 seats out of 101, the idea to "examine the matter on the accession of Moldova Russia-Belarus Union" and to assign the Russian language the status of second state language of the Republic of Moldova. PCRM gathered, in municipalities populated by ethnic minorities, basically more than 90% of votes.

It is obvious that governing parties can also shape the attitude of ethnic minorities towards certain topics, providing they do not conflict with policy options on foreign and security policy. For example, Moldovan governments show a pro-European attitude in the last decade and this has streamlined the substantially increasing number of citizens among ethnic minorities which express themselves in favor of European integration. This happened mainly due to the fact that idea of Moldova's European integration is not perceived as an anti-Russian project. If in 2001 approximately 28% of Russians, 24% of Ukrainians and 33% of other ethnic minorities were supporting the idea of Moldova's accession to EU³, then in 2011 numbers of those that would vote to join the European Union are 40% of Russians, 41% of Ukrainians and 54% of other ethnic minorities who support EU membership.⁴

There is, however, a level of political tolerance towards a few sensitive issues of international politics regarding which Chisinau administration prefers not to discuss. One of the topics of this kind is relationships with NATO. For example, if for Moldovans/Romanians the best solutions to ensure state security were neutrality (first option) and NATO (second), then for representatives of ethnic minorities, neutrality and Collective Security Treaty of CIS were basic options. It should be noted, however, that general country trend is growing in favor of neutrality (62%) towards accession to NATO (12%), were approximately 25% have no response.⁵

Ethnic minorities in the Republic of Moldova: political integration or alienation

Since gaining independence in 1991, in terms of legislation, one adopted a normative basis that recognizes the existence of ethnic minorities and provides measures to respect their rights. The legislative framework has tended to eliminate patterns of segregation, discrimination or assimilation of ethnic minorities in Moldova. The problem is however in the discrepancy between approach and implementation of integration model so that there is a feeling of alienation of minorities from Moldovan society. Chisinau policy towards ethnic minorities can be summarized in the following terms – it did not take anything from minorities, nor gave them tools to integrate them into Moldovan society.

Priorities of ethnic minorities are the result of complex causes related to state policy, cultural or historic aspect underlying their behavior in country's political process. First, it should be noted that Chisinau

2 I.C. Jigau, Standing of Moldova's electoral space, peculiarities and dynamic of its development, http://wciom.ru/fileadmin/Monitoring/101/2011_%28101%29_14_Zhigau.pdf

3 Barometer of Public Opinion, May 2001, Institute for Public Policy

4 Barometer of Public Opinion, May 2011, Institute for Public Policy

5 Idem

has done very little to integrate ethnic minorities into society. One of the reasons put forward by the representatives of ethnic minorities that explain this situation is that governing parties practically excluded them from state governing structures at all levels. The situation is similar regarding state linguistic policy. The degrees conflict between Chisinau and Comrat shows us that Chisinau is bound to raise promotion of Romanian language to the rank of state policy and has to realize that language integration of all ethnicities in the country may represent an important pylon of state sovereignty. □ Also here we could refer to the fact that political debates in Russian language do not exist on public television. Consequently, the focus of ethnic minorities has turned to other televisions having national coverage that have another way of handling political events.

Another problem is the way how are interpreted certain symbols that constitute a pylon of collective memory of ethnic minorities. Attempts to give another qualification to some historical events are interpreted by minorities, who were educated in the spirit of Soviet propaganda, as attempts to revise historical truth; as an example may serve the decision to announce the day of 28 June 1940 as the day of Moldova occupation. Therefore, this declaration has had a negative echo that exceeded the borders of Moldova and resulted in imposition of commercial barriers for Moldovan products on Russian market. In a heavily influenced media space by Russia, signals coming from Moscow shape and encourage the behavior of ethnic minorities towards certain problems.

Finally, it should be noted that certain parties deliberately strain certain cultural aspects in order to obtain the support of some society categories within electoral process. However, a direct consequence of these exaggerations is antagonizing society of ethnic criteria. For example, the PCRM in electoral campaigns of 2009 and 2010, which have polarized society in “patriots and those who want the disappearance of Moldova”. In this situation, Romanian factor was used to scare off the Communists in relation to ethnic minorities.

Conclusions

Moldova's population consists, aside from majority of Moldovans/Romanians, of Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, Bulgarians and other ethnic groups that constitute the fifth part of country population. Under these circumstances, the state and political parties must take into account the priorities of ethnic minorities, which is actually a normal exercise in a democratic state. The way that preferences of ethnic minorities are structured seem to demonstrate that Chisinau administration has failed to integrate these groups into Moldovan society, because they often show an attachment to these interests and values which are different from those of the majority of population. Adopting the model of integration of ethnic minorities, the state of Republic of Moldova did not prevent nor restricted their development, but neither has taken sustainable measures to integrate them into Moldovan society. Under these conditions appears the problem of loyalty and identification of ethnic minorities with interests of the Republic of Moldova.



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