

'Anti-oligarch spring', or temporary illusion in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine?

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The eastern neighborhood of the EU is now undergoing major democratic transformations, the irreversibility of which will require verification over time. In Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, anti-oligarchic rhetoric is the dominant element of political change.

In Ukraine, the newly elected president Volodymyr Zelensky promised the renewal of Ukrainian politics, which also means distancing of the government from the influence of the oligarchs, active during and before the presidency of Petro Poroshenko.

The establishment in Moldova of an anti-oligarchic, geo-political coalition became the driving force behind the restructuring of the political scene. leading to the abandoning of power by Vladimir Plahotniuc's Democratic Party,

Concurrently, in Georgia during these last days the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili has been forced to make concessions to protestors, whose ongoing daily street demonstrations were triggered initially by visiting Russian politicians, but have now morphed into radical criticism of the oligarch-dominated government.

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In Moldova the new Prime Minister, Maia Sandu, seeks to de-dramatize the Russian factor, focusing on economic co-operation with Russia, without geo-political confrontation. The same kind of argumentation has been pursued by Pashinyan. In both cases, actions to counter-act corruption and dismantle oligarchic schemes are favored, as well as the intensification of relations with the EU).

In Ukraine. President Zelensky wants to create support in the legislature through his "People's Servant" party, which in the early elections now due on July 21, 2019 could, according to the polls, get over half of the 450 seats in the Council with about 50% of the votes predicted in the polls. Pashinyan pursued the same tactic when he resigned in October 2018 to trigger parliamentary elections, when his "My Step" Bloc received over 70% of the votes).

Obtaining concessions from the government through street protests is common to Georgia and Armenia, although at a lower intensity than in Armenia in 2018. The protests of June 2019 in Tbilisi have forced Ivanishvili's regime to restoring proportional representation for the forthcoming 2020 elections.

Changes in Moldova - not revolution, but anti-Plahotniuc de-oligarchization

The political regime led by oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc is in continuous decomposition), and the Democratic Party announces that it is converting itself into a "European-style socialist" party. The Socialists and ACUM coalition are decoupling the institutions from the influences of the Democratic Party. Prime Minister Maia Sandu, with the support of the majority in parliament, applies 'lustration' to clean the system of people loyal to the previous oligarchic regime, and to replace them with people with high integrity, based on an open competition.

Thus, in just two weeks since the coalition took power, a range of resignations has been registered, including all the Constitutional Court's judges Anti-Corruption and the leadership of the General Police Inspectorate, the Public Property Agency's director and the head of Information and Security Service. The General Prosecutor, Eduard Harujen, whose mandate expires in 2020, still resists pressures to quit. Another priority is to change the composition of the Central Electoral Commission, in parallel with changing the electoral law to return to the proportional vote.

The PSRM-ACUM coalition is a delicate one, being mainly animated by their opposition to the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc. At the same time, the political rivalries within the ACUM bloc and between them and the Socialists are diluted by the appointment of rather apolitical decision-makers in about a third of ministries (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Ministry of Justice).

As early as possible, the ongoing de-oligarchisation should be transformed into permanent safeguards for the protection of institutions against possible oligarchic

interferences. The process of de-oligarchization has received prematurely the rating of a "revolution". In reality, Moldova is going through a redistribution of political power, which would not have been possible without the concert of foreign powers, and in particular Russia's strategic calculations. The essence of the process now is to restoring functionality of the institutions, and less a revolution openly requested by the public. System changes need to be made as soon as possible, during the calm period within the atypical cohabitation between the Socialists and ACUM.

The political events in Moldova complement the regional trends in the Eastern Partnership countries, where after Armenia in 2018 the oligarchic regimes of Ukraine and Georgia have begun to shake. However, the curtailing of oligarchic influence has to be a permanent and holistic objective, and not a temporary action aimed at a single oligarch.