

Crisis in the government coalition in Moldova

Kamil Całus

On 13 February, Prime Minister Vlad Filat stated that the agreement under which the coalition named Alliance for European Integration was established and which has been in force since November 2010 needed to be thoroughly reconstructed. He also announced his Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM) would be terminating this agreement. In an attempt to provide grounds for his decision, Filat argued that the political scene in Moldova had been skewed and criminalised. He pointed to Vlad Plahotniuc, first deputy speaker of parliament representing the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) and one of Moldova's richest businessmen, as the main culprit. Filat accused him for example of political corruption, buying votes, blackmailing MPs and ministers who are members of PLDM. While announcing his decision, Filat appealed to coalition members, PDM and the Liberal Party (PL), to enter into a new coalition agreement and thus reorganise the alliance to make it healthier and to liberate the state from Plahotniuc's influence. The prime minister also emphasised that he was opposed to the idea of a snap parliamentary election and recommended that the government should continue working according to the old rules. On 15 February, officers from the National Anti-Corruption Centre (CNA), an authority which the Democratic Party of Moldova has been put in charge of, searched the government offices, including the office of the prime minister and the National Tax Inspection. The CNA announced that it thus took action as part of the investigation into abuse of power and corruption among senior state officials. On the same day, PLDM, the Communists and the independent MPs cast enough votes to remove Plahotniuc from his position as first deputy speaker of parliament.

Commentary

- Tension existing between Filat and Plahotniuc, which has been intensifying over the past few months, is the real reason behind this unexpected decision from the prime minister. The main cause of the conflict between these two politicians is that they are both striving for power. Although the Democrats have protested against Plahotniuc's dismissal and the Liberals have criticised Filat, the parties which form the alliance are clearly ready to rescue the coalition agreement. The most likely scenario seems to be a reconstruction of the alliance; it will be formed by the same members, but the distribution of influence inside it will be different. PLDM will certainly wish to gain control of the public prosecution authorities, the CNA and probably of the Ministry of the Economy, all of

which are currently controlled by the Democratic Party of Moldova. This would mean a significant strengthening of Filat's party. Any compromise will depend on PDM's readiness to make concessions regarding the distribution of senior positions, especially that of the prosecutor general. If this position were taken by a member of PLDM, Filat would be able to launch the procedure aimed at stripping Plahotniuc of immunity and bringing him to court.

- The prime minister's decision to leave the coalition and to openly declare war on Plahotniuc was probably a move made in anticipation of action from the CNA, which is unofficially controlled by Plahotniuc. According to Moldovan media reports, the CNA has been collecting evidence since September last year in investigations against ministers and officials nominated by Filat.
- The aim of the coalition crisis which Filat has initiated is to capitalise on the present weakness of PDM. The Democrats are currently ready to make concessions since at this moment they would have not been able to form a majority coalition with any other grouping besides PLDM and are facing the risk of being removed from power. PDM cannot, furthermore, expect a good result in a snap election. Thus this party seems likely to accept the prime minister's demands concerning the removal of Plahotniuc in order to maintain its place in the government coalition.