

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL CRISES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POWER-OPPOSITION RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract: *The article analyses the dynamics of the relationship between the government and the opposition in the Republic of Moldova, focusing on its evolution, the challenges encountered and the implications for the country's political and institutional development. The study explores the mechanisms of interaction between the governing authorities and opposition forces within a fragile democracy. Key moments of political confrontation, the influence of external factors, and the role of civil society in mediating power dynamics are highlighted. The article also examines the legislative and institutional mechanisms that define the balance between power and opposition, assessing their effectiveness in ensuring political stability and democratic governance.*

As of early 2025, the relationship between the ruling authorities and the opposition in the Republic of Moldova is marked by significant tension and polarization. The government, led by President Maia Sandu and her pro-European party, continues to push for deeper integration with the European Union. This agenda has garnered strong support from part of the population but has also provoked resistance from opposition factions that favor closer ties with Russia. In this volatile environment, Moldova faces the dual challenge of safeguarding its sovereignty and promoting political stability. The power-opposition dynamic is often adversarial, with little room for constructive dialogue or compromise. Moving forward, both sides must prioritize democratic norms and work toward common goals to address pressing issues such as economic reform, corruption, and geopolitical security. By identifying the strengths and vulnerabilities of this relationship, the study provides insight into the broader context of Moldova's democratic consolidation and offers recommendations for strengthening political dialogue and cooperation.

Keywords: *crises, opposition, power, governance, democracy.*

Political crises are significant events that mark the history of a country.

These crises disrupt the stable balance of incremental decision-making processes under the auspices of a dominant coalition. When the issues faced by the political system can no longer be resolved gradually, they lead to political crises – “major events such as wars, decision-making revocations, challenges to governmental legitimacy – where passions are stirred, and the survival of the system is often at stake” (Verba, 1965: 555).

For the political system, a crisis presents the danger of change, development, and modernization. Political crises generally result from weak governance, not merely from poor economic performance. Specifically, political crises may also arise from corruption and bias, the disregard for the rule of law, large-scale scandals, and the overall inefficiency of the government.

Given that political crises are not always the result of economic crises, there are notable historical examples - such as the experience of the interwar period in Europe in general, and the Weimar Republic in particular, as well as Latin America’s experience in the 1980s and 1990s – which indicate the potential for dramatic political implications stemming from deep economic crises.

In the context of more or less established democracies, with periodic repetitions of free and fair elections, there is an assumed involvement of five highly stylized political actors, including: interstate and supranational actors (primarily EU agencies), the national government, the (mass) opposition, other (competing) public authorities [such as the president (symbolic), courts, voters (in a referendum), or established interest groups], and new competitors (populist parties, social movement organizations, public interest groups).

My reasoning starts from the premise that national governments (potentially in combination with international and supranational agencies) are the key actors with the initiative to address the economic crisis: During the Great Recession, national governments were those (forced to) adopt austerity policies, to which the other three types of actors (opposition, other public authorities, and external competitors) responded, setting in motion a dynamic of interaction that ultimately determines the political consequences of the economic crisis. (Gourevitch, 1984: 95-129)

Representative democracy has crystallized, which implies “that the people, the sole holder of sovereignty, periodically and temporarily elects a number of individuals to exercise sovereignty on their behalf.”

A significant contribution to the analysis of the phenomenon of political opposition and its relationship with power has been made by well-known political scientists such as M. Duverger, R. Dahl, G. Sartori, D. Easton, G. Almond, S. Verba, and others. In contemporary specialized literature in Moldova, the phenomenon of political opposition, in our opinion, receives minor attention. Among the Moldovan authors, we mention C. Solomon, V. Moșneaga, I. Nicolaev, and I. Bucătaru (Solomon & Enea, 2012: 69-86).

Opposition cannot exist outside of power; it is “connected” to power through its opposition to power. It should be noted that the issue here does not lie in oppositionality (many are dissatisfied with various aspects and personal issues), but rather in the fact that the opposition is characterized by a very important indicator, namely, the struggle to seize power. Power and opposition are parts of a political conflict, each claiming the right to represent the majority’s interests and to formulate the notion of the common good by utilizing the high public status of governance. (cf. Moșneaga et alii, 2013: 139-147)

Fragile democracies refer to political systems that, although democratic in form, face significant challenges in maintaining stability, legitimacy, and effective governance.

These challenges can arise from a range of factors, including weak political institutions, corruption, economic inequality, social unrest, or the erosion of democratic norms. In fragile democracies, the rule of law may be inconsistent, and the protection of civil liberties may be under threat, creating an environment where the democratic system is vulnerable to backsliding or authoritarian tendencies.

In such contexts, political opposition plays a crucial role in safeguarding democracy. A strong, vibrant opposition provides checks and balances on the ruling government, ensures that the voices of different segments of society are heard, and holds those in power accountable for their actions. In fragile democracies, opposition parties face unique challenges. They often struggle with limited resources, political repression, or legal restrictions, making it difficult for them to effectively challenge the ruling party. Despite these obstacles, the existence of a robust opposition is essential for preventing democratic erosion and ensure that political power is not concentrated in the hands of a single entity.

In many fragile democracies, the opposition must navigate a delicate balance: they need to be critical of government actions while also participating in constructive dialogue and offering alternative policies. The strength of the opposition can often determine whether a democracy remains on course or descends into authoritarianism. It is, therefore, crucial for both the government and opposition to respect democratic principles, foster inclusive political discourse, and prioritize the well-being of the nation over partisan interests.

The Opposition is usually interpreted in a narrow and broad sense.

In a broad sense, the term refers to almost all direct and indirect expressions of dissent and dissatisfaction with the existing regime. In a narrow sense, opposition is understood as a party or a coalition of parties hoping to win in the next general elections (Bromhead, 1978: 238).

In general, the term “opposition” defines a group of individuals in society, an organization, or a party that pursues a policy of resistance, opposition, or counteraction to the majority. Politically, the existence of opposition signifies a principled and intransigent impossibility of maintaining a perennial attitude toward the goals pursued by the political power.

In different political systems, the opposition plays various roles. For instance, in a totalitarian system, the political power suppresses any attempt by the opposition to organize, as the political power perceives opposition as a threat to itself and an anti-state phenomenon. In contrast, in a democracy, opposition is an essential component of political and social life, necessary for the rotation of power between governing parties.

The opposition is characterized by its goals and the means it employs. The primary goal of any opposition is to gain power and governance. Regarding the means of opposition, they are often classified into loyal and disloyal methods.

The conditions and factors that determine the essence and characteristics of political opposition are the particularities of political regimes and dominant political institutions, the maturity of political elites, and the political culture of the population/electorate. All of these factors contribute to the diversity of types of political opposition.

Context in the country and key trends relevant to correlations between power and political opposition

According to Article 2, paragraph (1) of the Constitution, “National sovereignty belongs to the people of the Republic of Moldova, who exercise it directly and through their representative bodies in the forms established by the Constitution.” (CRM, 1994).

Furthermore, Article 60, paragraph (1) of the Constitution states that “The Parliament is the supreme representative body of the people and the sole legislative authority,” elected through “universal, equal, direct, secret, and freely expressed voting.” (CRM, 1994: Art. 61, paragraph 1).

Thus, two legal entities are formed within Parliament: the majority and the parliamentary opposition.

a) The Parliamentary Majority.

According to Article 4, paragraph (12) of the Regulation, “The parliamentary majority is considered to be the faction or coalition of factions, announced by declaration, which comprises more than half of the elected deputies.”

From these regulatory provisions, it follows that the “parliamentary majority” can consist of either a single faction or a “coalition of factions.” In either case, it must numerically include “more than half of the elected deputies.”

Parliament, in its entirety, comprising all elected deputies, constitutes the National Representation, whose legitimacy resides in the will of the sovereign people (CRM, 1994: Art. 38, paragraph 1). In these circumstances, a natural question arises: what is the legal status of the factions that are not part of the “parliamentary majority,” based on the principle of political pluralism (CRM, 1994: Art. 5, paragraph 1), as well as the status of deputies, according to which “In the exercise of their mandate, deputies serve the people” (CRM, 1994: Art. 68, paragraph 1)?

The answer to these constitutional regulations is found in Article 4, paragraph (13) of the Regulation, which states: “The parliamentary opposition is considered to be the faction or factions that are not part of the parliamentary majority and that have declared themselves in opposition to it.” (CRM, 1994)

Thus, we observe that even the factions that are not part of the “parliamentary majority” also acquire a special legal status under the title of “parliamentary opposition.” However, even in this case, the procedure must be respected, according to which the faction or factions become an internal legal structure of Parliament as the opposition. Thus, during their meetings, factions adopt respective decisions, which are announced in the plenary session of Parliament, declaring themselves in opposition to the parliamentary majority. Along with the minutes, these decisions are transmitted to the President of Parliament. From this moment, the “parliamentary opposition” is legally and legitimately constituted as a legal structure of Parliament, forming the second hemisphere of its structure.

The Parliament’s Regulation does not further elaborate on the legal status of the parliamentary opposition but operates in general terms with the duties of “parliamentary factions” [Article 6 of the Regulation], which are represented proportionally to the number of members in all permanent, temporary, or special structures.

Nevertheless, constitutional doctrine formulates certain requirements for the opposition. For example, “the opposition must be as capable and effective as the government.” If it adopts only a negative stance towards any governmental action, it will cease to be represented and will lose its audience. This is because “Opposing without proposing an alternative lead, in the end, to self-defeat.” (Ionescu & de Madariaga, 1992: 84).

Thus, in the practice of parliamentary law as a legal institution of Constitutional Law, the relationship between the “parliamentary majority” and the “opposition” is based on the principle: “The majority decides – the opposition expresses itself.” This principle is “indissolubly linked to political pluralism and the very existence of the rule of law. In any

democratic state, the rights of the opposition must be respected, and it is entitled, by virtue of this principle, not only to actively participate in parliamentary life but also to formulate motions and even motions of no confidence against the Government when it considers there are deficiencies that need to be corrected.” (Călinoiu & Duculescu, 2006: 53).

Summarizing the above, it becomes clear that the role of the opposition is to scrutinize governance by raising public awareness of potential shortcomings and to formulate and present socio-economic and political alternatives in relation to the parliamentary majority.

Parliament, as the supreme representative body of the people and the sole legislative authority, is also a political-state institution with its own internal structure, established by the text of the Constitution and the Parliament's Regulation. In accordance with the principle of political pluralism stipulated in Article 5 of the Constitution and the establishment of Parliament based on the principle of representativeness (CRM, 1994: Art. 2, paragraph 1), resulting from the free expression of the sovereign people (CRM, 1994: Art. 38, paragraph 1), the electoral competitors who have obtained deputy mandates based on party lists form “parliamentary factions” in Parliament (CRM, 1994: Art. 4, paragraph 1).

Thus constituted, parliamentary factions, as legal-political structures, are internal bodies of Parliament, tasked with forming working bodies and organizing Parliament's activity, with their constitutional and regulatory duties determined.

Under the conditions established by regulatory provisions, a “faction” or a “coalition of factions,” as the case may be, can constitute a “parliamentary majority” and, respectively, a “parliamentary opposition.”

The “parliamentary majority,” as an internal legal structure of Parliament, can be constituted from a single faction or a coalition of factions, provided that they numerically consist of more than half the number of elected deputies, officially declared in a plenary session of Parliament with the presentation of the constitutive legal acts and fully assuming the act of governing society.

The “parliamentary opposition” is considered to be the faction or factions that are not part of the “parliamentary majority,” officially declared in the plenary session of Parliament with the presentation of the corresponding legal acts, and whose role is to scrutinize the activity of the “parliamentary majority,” to formulate motions of no confidence, and to propose socio-economic and political alternatives to the act of governance.

Proposals

Parliament, as the supreme representative body of the people and the sole legislative authority, also has the function of overseeing the Government. Thus, according to Article 66, paragraph (f) (CRM, 1994), Parliament “exercises parliamentary control over the executive power under the forms and within the limits provided by the Constitution.” Moreover, Article 105, titled “Questions and Interpellations,” represents one of the forms of parliamentary oversight, which the opposition usually utilizes during the “Government Hour.” Nevertheless, we consider it appropriate to: establish through the Parliament's Regulation an “Opposition Hour” to be broadcast on Tele-Radio Moldova, with national coverage, to raise public awareness of any potential deficiencies, failures, or unconstitutional acts adopted or planned by the parliamentary majority.

In 2023, the Republic of Moldova continued to face the consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine in the form of energy, economic, and social crises, as well as security threats. The country's administration continued to govern

under the state of emergency adopted by Parliament immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and extended successively until the end of 2023.

In 2023, the Republic of Moldova hosted over 100,000 people displaced from Ukraine as a result of the war. The year began with a change of government: in February 2023, Dorin Recean was appointed Prime Minister following the resignation of Natalia Gavriluță. The government led by Recean continued the EU integration trajectory established earlier. It pursued an agenda to fulfill EU conditionalities, an effort recognized in November with the European Commission's recommendation to open accession negotiations.

Some of the Government's efforts were directed towards strengthening security and countering the influence of the Russian Federation, which is waging a hybrid war against the Republic of Moldova, particularly in the informational sphere, as a significant segment of the population (35%) still shares Russian propaganda narratives.

In June, the Constitutional Court declared the Political Party "Șor" unconstitutional and dissolved it on the grounds that it militated against the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova and undermined democracy and the principles of the rule of law. Previously, the party's leader, fugitive Ilan Șor, was sentenced to 15 years in prison in the "Bank Fraud" case, with an obligation to return over €260 million. The EU Council also imposed sanctions on several individuals, including the leaders of the "Șor" party, for actions destabilizing the Republic of Moldova. Members of a party declared unconstitutional, who are suspected, accused, indicted, convicted, or included on international sanctions lists, were subsequently prohibited from participating in elections.

Further efforts need to be made to improve transparency by planning oversight activities and public hearings, publishing the parliamentary calendar well in advance and increasing the accountability of parliamentarians.

The recommendation suggests the need to enhance transparency by planning oversight activities and public hearings, publishing the parliamentary calendar well in advance and increasing the accountability of parliamentarians. Between January and May 2024, there were some notable developments in parliamentary work. Three opposition bills were tabled and discussed in plenary sessions. Also, in nine plenary sessions, the opposition made 46 proposals to hear leaders or representatives of public authorities - but none of them were accepted. According to Parliament's official website (www.parlament.md), 34 public consultations were announced. During this period, 17 bills were adopted under the priority procedure and no bills were adopted under the urgency procedure.

For the full year 2023, according to Promo-LEX data, the Parliament registered various activities and initiatives that partly reflect efforts to increase transparency. Only four questions were addressed to members of the Government and heads of public authorities during this period. (RPL, 2023-2024)

Twelve institutions presented annual reports to the plenary. 100% of the ex-post legal assessment was carried out, but only 24% of the ex-post impact assessment by the standing committees. No bill drafted exclusively by opposition MPs was adopted in 2023. The exception is one bill, Law No. 339/2023, which was promoted and passed in the first reading. Opposition MPs made 40 proposals to hear leaders or representatives of public authorities in 20 plenary sessions. The rate of amendments to the plenary agenda was over 48% in the spring 2023 session, dropping to 35% in the fall 2023 session. The majority of bills voted on in the 2023 sessions (56%) were submitted by the Government. Of the 252 total bills introduced in 2023 by lawmakers, the proportion of bills publicly consulted on was 17%. The number of public consultation announcements in 2023 was 89.

MPs from the Bloc of Communists and Socialists (BCS) did not attend five plenary sittings in protest, which accounted for 36% of all sittings.

At the same time, the independent MPs (former members of the “Shor” party) did not participate in the elections. However, none of these proposals were accepted. This suggests institutional and political resistance to opposition initiatives, thus limiting opportunities for oversight and transparency. The data show that while the attendance of MEPs at the beginning of plenary sittings is relatively high, the actual turnout varies between 69% and 100%. This fluctuation reflects a problem in maintaining a consistent level of commitment and engagement from MEPs. Inconsistent participation can undermine the legislative process and damage public confidence in the accountability of parliamentarians. In the fall session of 2023, there were 226 absences, 120 fewer than in the fall session of 2022. However, absences remain a significant problem. Members of the Bloc of Communists and Socialists (BCS) boycotted five plenary sittings, representing 36% of all sittings, and independent MPs (former members of the “Shor” party) did not attend any sittings.

The frequent absences of MEPs, especially those from the opposition, affect the debate on draft legislation and reduce the opportunity for genuine and constructive debates. No bill drafted exclusively by opposition MPs was adopted in 2023. The exception is only one bill, Law No. 339/2023, which was promoted and passed in the first reading. In addition, during 20 plenary sessions, the opposition made 40 proposals to hear leaders or representatives of public authorities, but these were mostly rejected. Such a situation reflects a deficiency in integrating opposition perspectives into the legislative process. The rate of plenary agenda amendments was over 48% in the spring 2023 session, dropping to 35% in the fall 2023 session. These frequent changes suggest insufficient scheduling and can create confusion and difficulties in effectively tracking and participating in parliamentary business. pat to any plenary session.

The Code regulates the mode of constitution, organization and functioning of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, the legal relations between the Parliament and other authorities, and establishes the status of the MP and the Parliament Secretariat. According to the Code, MPs will take the oath of office as an element of legitimizing the effective start of the exercise of their mandate and their accountability to the people. Another provision of the draft concerns the rights of the parliamentary opposition, including the right of the Opposition Day, which will be organized twice in a session, upon request at least ten days in advance. The document also regulates non-ordinary procedures for the examination of draft legislation, such as the priority and urgency procedures. Priority consideration means halving the procedural deadline. Drafts requested by the Government under the urgency procedure will be presented in plenary by the Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister.

The 11th Legislature (period June 16, 2022 – June 15, 2023):

Fraction	Statute	The number of deputies in the faction	The average number of absent deputies per plenary session	The proportion of absences per faction
PAS	Single-party governance	63	5.25	8.34%
BCS	Opposition	27-32	5.48	17.75%
PPS	Opposition	5-6	5.04	86.87%

Conclusion

The relationship between power and opposition in the Republic of Moldova remains a cornerstone of the country's democratic evolution. Despite significant progress in building democratic institutions, this relationship is often marked by polarization, political instability, and external influences. The effectiveness of Moldova's democracy depends on the ability of both power and opposition to engage in constructive dialogue, respect democratic norms, and prioritize the public interest over partisan agendas. Strengthening institutional frameworks, promoting transparency, and fostering a culture of political compromise are essential steps toward ensuring sustainable governance and democratic consolidation. By addressing these challenges, the Republic of Moldova has the potential to build a more resilient and inclusive political system that reflects the aspirations of its citizens.

The dynamics between power and opposition in the Republic of Moldova reflect broader trends in post-Soviet states, where democratization often encounters systemic obstacles. A balanced relationship between these two forces is crucial for ensuring accountability, safeguarding citizens' rights, and preventing authoritarian tendencies. To achieve this balance, it is vital to strengthen the rule of law, enhance the independence of judicial and electoral institutions, and create platforms for meaningful public participation in the political process. Furthermore, international support and collaboration can play a pivotal role in reinforcing Moldova's democratic trajectory, encouraging reforms, and mitigating external pressures that may influence internal politics.

As of early 2025, the relationship between the ruling authorities and the opposition in the Republic of Moldova is marked by significant tension and polarization. The government, led by President Maia Sandu and her pro-European party, continues to push for deeper integration with the European Union. This agenda has garnered strong support from part of the population but has also provoked resistance from opposition factions that favor closer ties with Russia.

Recent developments, such as the October 2024 referendum on EU membership, have highlighted the stark divisions within Moldovan society. The referendum narrowly passed, with 50.39% of voters supporting constitutional amendments to anchor Moldova's path toward EU accession. However, the close results underscored a fragmented electorate and a divided political landscape.

The opposition, which includes pro-Russian parties and other populist forces, has accused the government of ignoring the concerns of citizens who prioritize neutrality or closer economic ties with Eastern partners. Meanwhile, the ruling authorities have criticized the opposition for allegedly undermining democratic processes by collaborating with foreign actors, particularly Russia. Reports of Russian interference, including financial support for opposition groups and attempts to sway public opinion during the referendum, have further deepened mistrust between the two sides.

In this volatile environment, Moldova faces the dual challenge of safeguarding its sovereignty and promoting political stability. The power-opposition dynamic is often adversarial, with little room for constructive dialogue or compromise. Moving forward, both sides must prioritize democratic norms and work toward common goals to address pressing issues such as economic reform, corruption, and geopolitical security. Strengthening institutional safeguards and fostering a culture of political dialogue will be key to overcoming these challenges and ensuring Moldova's continued progress toward democratic consolidation and European integration.

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