

Moldova Gets West-Leaning Cabinet

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Government ministers in Moldova's new Cabinet lining up before a swearing-in ceremony in Chisinau on Friday. **Victor Dimitrov**

CHISINAU, Moldova — Moldova's parliament has approved a new West-leaning government with a program that endorsed integration into the European mainstream as a main goal.

Adoption of the new Cabinet, presented by Prime Minister Vlad Filat on Friday, is a first step to election later this year of a president to end a political stalemate that has blocked reform.

Three parties re-formed the Alliance for European Integration coalition after defeating the powerful opposition Communists in an election last November.

On Friday, the support of its 59 members in parliament was enough to install the new government, even though the Communists refused to take part in the vote.

Filat, presenting his government's program to parliament, set joining the European mainstream as one of the main goals. He went on to say that maintaining strategic relations with Russia, the United States, Romania and Ukraine would also be a priority.

Russia — which supplies Moldova with most of its energy needs — and European Union member Romania have long vied for influence in the landlocked country of 4.5 million.

Moldova, which has borders with Romania and Ukraine, is one of Europe's poorest states with an average salary of \$240 a month. Poor job prospects are driving more young Moldovans to go and work abroad, depriving the country of skilled labor.

Filat pledged renewed efforts to lift people out of poverty. "Citizens of Moldova live poorly and even very poorly so we must firstly develop the economy to raise living standards," he said.

Widespread corruption, which is a big deterrent to foreign investment in Moldova, will also be tackled.

"We will not be able to achieve a raising of living standards if we do not overcome corruption. For this reason, the government will continue reforming law enforcement agencies," Filat said.

The pro-West leadership still faces the task of trying to push through the election of a president to complete Moldova's political jigsaw and move forward with a reform program.

The election of a president is carried out by parliament in Moldova and — unlike approval of the new government — requires at least 61 votes in the 101-seat assembly.

The Communists were able twice to block the Alliance's candidate for president in 2009. The Alliance is now stronger with 59 votes in parliament, and though it is still two short of the required 61, it is hoping to secure two defections from the Communists to secure election of its candidate.

The Alliance's candidate for president could again be Marian Lupu, a center-left politician who heads the Democratic Party in the three-party coalition.

He is now parliament speaker and, as such, will exert the functions of acting president until a fresh attempt is made to elect a full-time president.

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