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# After 3 Years, Moldova Elects a President

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President Nicolae Timofti speaking after his election Friday in Chisinau. **Viktor Dimitrov**

CHISINAU, Moldova — Moldova's parliament elected a veteran judge who vowed to tackle rampant corruption as the country's new president Friday, ending a three-year hiatus that had delayed reform in the country.

Nicolae Timofti, 63, a relatively politically neutral figure, was put forward by the ruling Alliance for European Integration to break the impasse caused by Communist opposition to its previous candidate, an Alliance leader.

He won over three Communist defectors to bolster the three-party ruling coalition's 59 votes, giving him 62 votes in the 101-seat chamber.

"After 917 days, the epic of electing a president is over," parliamentary commission chairman Tudor Deliu told deputies.

Veteran Communist leader Vladimir Voronin angrily denounced "treachery" by the three

defectors, who quit the party last November, and tens of thousands of Communists marched through the city center, shouting "Down with the usurpers!"

Police said 70,000 massed near the main government building, while the Communists put their number at 100,000. Special forces in riot gear ringed the parliament building itself during the voting session and patrolled side streets.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, in a joint statement with Stefan Fule, the EU's enlargement commissioner, said the vote would open up dialogue in the country.

"This paves the way for an inclusive dialogue between all political factions with a view to responding further to the economic and social aspirations of the country and consolidating Moldovan society," they said in a statement.

Romanian President Traian Basescu said he had assured Timofti of Romania's support for reform in Moldova and for moving closer to the EU.

A new leadership could also help resolve the status of Transdnestr, a strip of land on Moldova's eastern border controlled by pro-Moscow separatists for the past 20 years.

Transdnestr, which has no international recognition as an independent territory, itself elected a new leader last December, increasing prospects of a long-term settlement.

Igor Dodon, leader of the three-man socialist group which broke communist ranks, announced they would support Timofti after he had presented his program, saying his election was a better option than pushing for early parliamentary elections.

"We must put an end to the crisis and get down to work for the good of the country," he told the parliamentary session.

In his speech before the vote, Timofti pledged to maintain strategic ties with the United States, Russia and Germany, as well as strive for a settlement of the Transdnestr problem.

He pledged to combat large-scale systemic corruption, which is rife in Moldova as in several other former Soviet republics.

"I am aware that I will become the president of the poorest country in Europe, consequently I consider it a question of principle to lead the fight on corruption," he said.

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