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Revolutionary Winds Blowing Across Moldova

By Boris Kagarlitsky

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While Russians ponder the results of this winter's political crisis, a revolution is shaping up in Moldova.

Communists led Moldova until the Alliance for European Integration, a coalition of three right-wing parties, came to power three years ago. Everyone had been unhappy with the Communist leadership: The left was angry that the Communists' social reforms failed to extend beyond the usual "bourgeois" democracy, ordinary citizens complained about excessive bureaucracy and corruption, and the political right hated everything down to the name of the ruling party.

Moldovan voters grew tired of the Communists during the eight years of President Vladimir Voronin's rule. The government had become a well-functioning administrative team, but without strategic planning or a clear vision. Even the government grew dissatisfied with itself: Mark Tkachuk, head of the presidential administration, complained that he "began to feel like

Surkov'' — the former Kremlin ideologist.

When the new administration came to power in 2009, it seemed as if Moldova had turned over a new leaf. Voters hoped they had forever rid themselves of Voronin and the Communist Party — and all without having to resort to massive demonstrations.

But things turned out differently.

Three years later, voters are openly nostalgic for Voronin's government. It turns out that while he was in office, the average monthly salary in Moldova rose from 20 euros to 300 euros ($27 to $400), social spending increased and the country's political institutions gained strength. Although the conflict with the breakaway region of Transdnestr was not resolved, the threat of war disappeared. The government revived economic growth by investing in the construction of a railroad and a port on the Danube. Private investment also grew.

The right-wing forces that replaced the Communists failed to improve the situation and actually exacerbated the crisis with incompetent and irresponsible actions. Liberal spending policies created budget deficits that led to higher taxes — a scenario that also played out in southern European countries. Investment and demand plummeted, while national debt grew. The government even closed schools and hospitals in an attempt to balance the budget.

The Alliance was unable to elect a president during its entire three years in power. The most recent election, held March 16, was pushed through without offering voters any choice. The name of the only candidate in the running, lawyer Nicolae Timofti, was withheld until the last moment, and the time for voting was secretly moved from 3 p.m. to 8 a.m. Timofti was elected president while thousands of outraged citizens protested outside the parliament building.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party has made a noticeable shift to the left. Moderate politicians and careerists who had joined the party during its years in power have since switched over to the Alliance. As a result, the Communists are now, on average, younger than before. In Chisinau, thousands of party members rally around the red flag. Municipal elections ended with victory for the opposition. After leaving parliament, the Communist Party shifted its activity to the streets. In every region of the republic, committees formed that in turn led to the formation of a Civic Congress that claims to be an alternative government.

Now the new president must prove to the Moldovan people that the current government will somehow be able to rectify the situation. If he fails, new mass demonstrations are scheduled to be held in Chisinau on May 1, and those rallies threaten to become the beginning of a revolutionary uprising.

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