

Protesters Vow 'Non-Stop' Action in Moldova Over Banking Fraud

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A man sits in front of the tents set by protesters after an anti-government rally, organized by the civic platform “Dignity and Truth” (DA) on Sunday, in central Chisinau, Moldova, Sept. 7.

CHISINAU — Protesters who camped overnight in the Moldovan capital Chisinau vowed on Monday to press round-the-clock action against what they see as widespread corruption and force the resignation of senior officials, including the president.

Angered by a fraud in which \$1 billion — roughly the equivalent of one-eighth of gross domestic product — has disappeared from the banking system, tens of thousands of protesters streamed into the capital of the poor, largely rural, ex-Soviet republic on Sunday. They massed near the government building in the biggest protests the country has seen.

The fraud has caused a sharp depreciation in the national currency, the leu, fueling inflation and driving down living standards in what is already one of Europe's poorest countries, where many struggle by on a family income of about \$300 a month or rely on money sent back by relatives working abroad.

It has seriously damaged the image of pro-Europe leaders who have ruled since 2009 but have done little to halt gross economic mismanagement or shake off accusations of high-level graft.

About 150 protesters set up about 80 tents and demanded the resignation of President Nicolae Timofti and other officials, including the governor of the national bank and early parliamentary elections.

"Our protest action will go on non-stop. People will go from here only when our demands are met," Valentin Dolganiuc, a leader of the civic platform Dignity and Justice (DA) which organized the protest, told Reuters.

Slogans in Sunday's huge protest targeted Moldova's super-wealthy oligarchs, particularly condemning two of the country's major power-brokers, former prime minister Vlad Filat and Vladimir Plahotniuc, Moldova's wealthiest oligarch.

The event united people from across the spectrum in a country heavily dependent on Russia for energy supplies and where strong pro-Russian feeling exists, especially in rural areas.

A display board in the "tent city" naming those who should be held to account included leaders from the pro-Russian socialists and communists as well as virtually all the pro-EU leadership.

Many protesters on Sunday held EU banners aloft while some speakers backed union with Romania, of which Moldova was a part before 1940.

"We have a duty to take back our country, which the oligarchs and bandits have seized from us," said Elena Cebanu, a 26-year-old nurse who spent the night in the tent city.

The scandal around the missing \$1 billion has led to the EU and other economic partners withholding assistance to Moldova until it is back on an International Monetary Fund program.

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