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IDIS „VIITORUL” EXPERT

STRUCTURE OF THE RAION COUNCILS ALLIANCES: BETWEEN HOPES AND FACTS

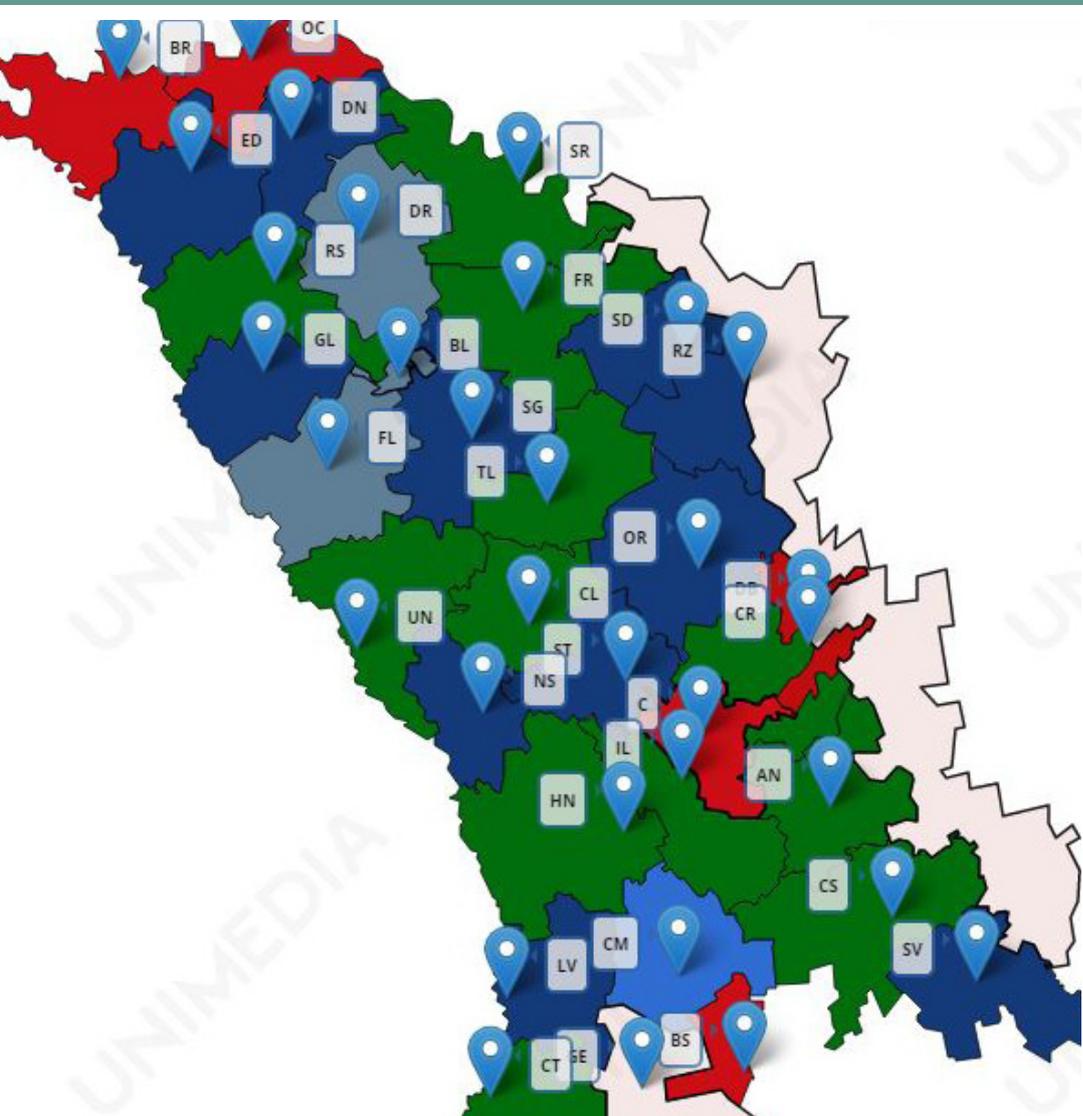
Policy Brief

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POLICY BRIEF

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Veaceslav Berbeca



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Introduction

On 14 June 2014, in Moldova, local elections were organized. These election, being held in difficult times from the economic, politic and social point of view, was a difficult test for the ruling parties, especially because of the banking system scandal. Despite the opinions that the parties that have run the country for the past six years will be penalized by the citizens in these local elections, the results achieved by the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM) and the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) were sufficiently good, which created preconditions for establishing local alliances at the raion level. Thus, immediately after the results of the local elections had been announced, the leader of the Democratic Party, Marian Lupu, and that of the Liberal Democratic Party, Vlad Filat, announced their intention of forming pro-European majorities in the local and raion councils.

This study presents an attempt to examine the conditions in which the raion coalitions were built in order to elect the leadership of the administrative-territorial units. The study was conducted by interviewing the political parties' candidates running for the raion presidency. The central focus was the main parties of the current governing coalition – PLDM and PDM - in terms of the results obtained in local elections and the number of the raion presidents they obtained. Mention should be made that the analysis focused, in particular, on the outcome of the negotiations between the political parties for the leadership of the raion. The author discussed also with the secretaries of the raion councils on the election process of the raion leadership and consulted the database of the Central Election Commission.

This study is interesting for several reasons. First, it shows that, although the party leaders have launched talks on creating pro-European coalitions, in reality, the things happened differently from what had been declared. In other words, the two parties have mutually excluded each other from the raion alliances, very often making coalitions with the parties that achieved good or very modest results while voting for the raion leadership. Second, this study shows that there is dissension at the local level between the main protagonists of the Moldovan political scene. The local leaders of the Liberal Democrats and Democrats have accused each other, invoking various problems of cohabitation at the raion level. It is not excluded that these actions could have been coordinated by the political parties at the central level. Thirdly, it shows that the parties with coalition potential - the Liberal Party (PL) and the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) – participated in the election of the raion leadership or agreed to take part in the coalitions formed without setting conditions of principle regarding the structure of the raion alliances. Fourth, it should be underlined that the representatives of the Socialist Party of Moldova (PSRM), whose leader said on various occasions that the Socialists would not vote with the parties of the ruling coalition, participated several times in the election of the raion leadership. The choice of several socialist councillors to vote was vehemently criticized by their party leader who referred to an earlier problem in the Moldovan politics, invoking pressure and other informal practices applied toward some politicians in order to persuade them to vote for the ruling parties.

Results of electoral candidates in the raion councils

The local elections were a very important political test for the main Moldovan political parties. We refer, in particular, to the parties that have been in power during 2013-2015, a stage marked by economic, financial and political crises. One of the main stakes of this election was the election of raion councillors, and respectively, formation of raion coalitions and election of the raion leadership. After the ruling coalitions, the raion alliances represent the next level of importance in terms of political influence. These institutions that are highly politicized in their activity make the subject of this study.

The local elections from 14 and 28 June were held under conditions of political, economic and financial crises. However, even in this situation, the main political forces that have governed Moldova for the past almost six years, have reconfirmed and even strengthened their positions. PDM, PLDM, LP and the “Moldovan European Popular Platform - Iurie Leanca” (BPPEM) Electoral Bloc obtained 70% of mayors¹. Geopolitics was one of the dominant themes of the local elections, especially in the big towns. The local elections have postponed to a considerable extent, the negotiations for a new governing coalition. Mention should be made that the creation of local alliances coincided with the negotiations over formation of the new governing coalition between the PLDM, PDM, and LP. In mid-July, according to the leaders of the three parties, during the last-minute talks on the creation of the government coalition², the democrats had 15 raion presidents compare to the 8 raion presidents of the Liberal Democrats. Taking into account certain features of the local coalitions creation to which this paper will refer below, it can be assumed that this dynamic served as an argument during the negotiations over the creation of the governing alliance.

¹ <http://www.e-democracy.md/elections/local/2015>

² http://www.publika.md/tara-are-nevoie-de-guvern-liderii-pl-pdm-si-pldm-grabesc-procesul-de-creare-a-coalitiei_2357701.html

In the local elections from 14 June, the leading candidates have obtained the following results in the local and municipal councils: PLDM - 18.28%, PDM – 17.59%, PSRM - 16.56%, PL - 12.62%, Our Party (PN) - 11.15%, PCRM- 10.23%, and BPPEM - 7.61%³. Comparing the results of the May 2011 local and municipal elections to those of the June 2015 elections, there is a significant decline of PCRM from 36.87% to 10.23%, a slight decrease in the votes obtained by PL from 16.19% to 12.62 and of the PLDM - from 22.62% to 18.28%. On the contrary, a significant increase can be observed in the results of PSRM - from 0.09% to 16.56%, and a slight increase for PDM - from 15.41% to 17.59%⁴. It should also be noted the excellent results obtained by BPPEM and PN that participated in the local elections for the first time. (Table 1, page 8)

This table reflects the results of the electoral competitors in the raion councils. Consequently, these data include only the parties that won the first or second place according to the number of seats obtained in the raion councils. According to this table, the highest ranked is PLDM, which got the largest number of seats in 13 raion councils, ranking second in the other 11 raions. PDM ranks first in 11 councils and second in the other 15 raions. These parties together have occupied the top two positions according to the number of seats obtained in 21 raion councils. Therefore, favourable conditions existed for the creation of local alliances with the participation of the pro-European parties.

The parties ranking next - PSRM, PN and PCRM- have achieved modest results in the raion councils, if we take as reference the first two places according to the number of seats in the raion councils. Thus, according to the results

³ <http://www.cec.md/index.php?pag=news&cid=1042&rid=13242&cl=ro>

⁴ <http://www.cec.md/files/files/Alegeri%20Locale%202011/Cons-raionali.pdf>

Table 1. Results of candidates in the raion councils

Political parties Raion	PLDM	PDM	PSRM	PN	PCRM	BPPEM
Anenii Noi	1 (9 seats)	2 (6 seats)				
Basarabeasca	2 (6 seats)		1 (6 seats)			
Briceni		2 (9 seats)	1 (9 seats)			
Cahul	1 (9 seats)	2 (7 seats)				
Cantemir	1 (11 seats)	2 (9 seats)				
Călărași	1 (10 seats)	2 (9 seats)				
Căușeni	1 (10 seats)	2 (7 seats)				
Cimișlia		2 (7 seats)				1 (10 seats)
Criuleni	1 (12 seats)	2 (6 seats)				
Dondușeni	2 (5 seats)	1 (7 seats)				
Drochia		2 (6 seats)		1 (9 seats)		
Dubăsari		2 (5 seats)			1 (12 seats)	
Edineț	2 (7 seats)	1 (9 seats)				
Fălești			2 (6 seats)	1 (10 seats)		
Florești	1 (8 seats)	2 (8 seats)				
Glodeni		1 (10 seats)		2 (7 seats)		
Hâncești	1 (13 seats)	2 (10 seats)				
Ialoveni	1 (13 seats)	2 (10 seats)				
Leova	2 (9 seats)	1 (12 seats)				
Nisporeni	2 (9 seats)	1 (15 seats)				
Ocnîța			1 (9 seats)		2 (8 seats)	
Orhei	2 (9 seats)	1 (9 seats)				
Rezina	2 (6 seats)	1 (11 seats)				
Râșcani	1 (9 seats)			2 (8 seats)		
Sângerei	2 (8 seats)	1 (8 seats)				
Soroca	1 (9 seats)		2 (6 seats)			
Strășeni	2 (7 seats)	1 (9 seats)				
Șoldănești	2 (7 seats)	1 (10 seats)				
Ștefan Vodă	2 (10 seats)	1 (10 seats)				
Taraclia			1 (10 seats)	2 (6 seats)		
Telenești	1 (13 seats)	2 (10 seats)				
Ungheni	1 (12 seats)	2 (7 seats)				

Source: Central Election Commission

obtained, PSRM holds primacy in 4 raions, PN- in 2 raions and PCRM - only in 1 raion. The second position, according to the number of seats, was obtained by Socialists in 2 raions, PN - in 3 raions, and the Communists - in 1 raion. These three parties have obtained the best results in the raions that traditionally vote for the leftist parties, except Falesti, which is the home of the PN leader. Thus, Dubasari, Ocnîța, Taraclia, the Gagauz Autonomous Region and Balti, which are not subject of this study, are towns that vote massively for the pro-Russia oriented leftist parties. These administrative units have been the subject of a study which evaluated the risks of the European integration in the raions with a hostile attitude towards the European integration process⁵.

⁵ Veaceslav Berbeca, Consequences of the referenda from UTA Găgăuzia on several raions of the Republic of Moldova, IDIS "Viitorul"/FES, Policy Brief, April 2014.

Finally, BPPEM ranked first in Cimișlia, which is the home of its leader, Iurie Leanca. It should be noted that PL, although it obtained 12.62% in the June local elections, it failed to place first or second in any raion. However, mention should be made that the Liberals have achieved good results in several raion councils, which gave them the opportunity to actively participate in the formation of raion coalitions. We refer here to the administrative-territorial units of the second level, where PL ranked third by the number of seats. PCRM found itself in a similar situation – due to its third place by the number of seats obtained, it participated in the formation of several raion coalitions⁶. In the specialized literature, these parties are defined as “coalition

⁶ PL (Călărași, Ialoveni, Nisporeni, Orhei, Strășeni, Telenești), PCRM (Cantemir, Căușeni, Criuleni, Florești, Rezina, Șoldănești, Taraclia) după http://www.cec.md/tr/rez_t1_2015/

potential” or “blackmail potential”⁷. Although this definition is related to national governing coalitions, in the present study, the term is used to describe the formation of coalitions at the raion level.

It should be underlined that, very often, the difference between the third place, on the one hand, and the fourth, fifth, and sixth places on the other hand, was insignificant, so as the Liberals or Communists had the necessary number of raion councillors in several raions to be able to form raion coalitions or participate in the

voting of the raion leadership. The best example of this is the distribution of the number of seats in the Cahul raion council, where PSRM (the third place), BPPEM (the fourth place), PN (the fifth place), PCRM (the sixth place) have obtained 4 seats each⁸. The difference in the final standings was dictated by the number of votes obtained by these parties in the June 2015 local elections. It should be noted that LP, which ranked seventh, the last position which passed the threshold in this raion, got three raion councillor seats, which gave PL the opportunity to become part of the Cahul raion coalition.

⁷ Arend Lijphard, *Modele ale democrației. Forme de guvernare și funcționare în treizeci și șase de țări* (Models of democracy. Forms of government and administration in 36 countries), Iași: Polirom, 2000, p. 77

⁸ http://www.cec.md/r/rez_t1_2015/

Formation of coalitions / raion majorities

The formation of raion coalitions by the pro-European parties was a major topic of discussion after the local elections of 14 June. Given the very good results achieved in the local elections, the leaders of these parties launched the idea of creating raion and local coalitions. This view was expressed after the first, but also the second round of the local elections.

Immediately after the announcement of the preliminary results on 14 June, the leaders of PLDM and PDM have expressed hope that pro-European coalitions will be created at the raion level, announcing that talks on the formation of local alliances had already begun⁹. The same idea was expressed by PL, which following the Liberal Party's Republican council meeting from 16 June 2015, decided to participate in the formation of local alliances with PLDM, PDM and BPPEM¹⁰. Subsequently, the leaders of the Liberal Democrats and Democrats reconfirmed the intention of establishing pro-European coalitions at the raion level. Thus, as a result of the meeting of the PLDM National Political Council, held on June 16, Vlad Filat stressed that "at the level of the 13 raions in which PLDM ranked first, discussions will start on the formation of pro-European majority coalitions"¹¹. In turn, Marian Lupu said in a press conference after the second round of the elections that "the pro-European parties obtained clear victory in the local elections, which allows for the creation of majorities in the local councils with the parties sharing the same vision - to maintain the country's European course"¹².

It should be noted that together with the creation of raion coalitions, also the raion leadership is elected that

⁹ http://www.publika.md/coalitii-dupa-alegeri-ce-spun-lupu-filat-ghimpu-si-dodon_2333111.html

¹⁰ <http://www.pl.md/libview.php?l=ro&cid=78&id=6491&t=/Pre-sa/tiri/COMUNICAT-DE-PRESA-PL>

¹¹ Information bulletin of PLDM, June 24, 2015. No. 18 (78) <http://pldm.md/images/stories/stiri/iunie2015/stejarul24iunie2015.pdf>

¹² <http://www.pdm.md/ro/noutati/stiri/marian-lupu-unul-din-trei-primari-nou-alesi-este-membru-al-pdm>

is composed of the raion president and vice presidents. The raion councils constitute an arena of political struggles for the leadership positions at the local level. It is absolutely natural for the political parties to want to have the leadership positions or at least to be part of the ruling raion coalition as the parties can consolidate their position through the raion leadership, by means of supporting various projects of public interest at their request. The same goes for the president of the raion. Mention should be made that, as a rule, the presidents of the raion councils are also leaders of the party territorial organizations.

The raion councils is the glue between the ruling parties and the local public administration of the first level. In other words, the governing bodies of the raion councils are an important element in the allocation of public financial resources for various local projects. In particular, it is about the road fund allocations, because according to art. 4, paragraph 2, letter *c* of the Law on the Administrative Decentralization from 2006, "construction, administration and repair of the roads and road infrastructure at the raion level fall under the responsibility of the local public authorities of the first and second levels".

The Law on the Administrative Decentralization from 2006, art. 4, paragraph 2, letters *g'* and *j*, sets also other important sectors which constitute the field of activity of the local public authorities of the second level. These include the education involving maintenance of primary schools and kindergartens, gymnasiums and high schools, vocational schools, boarding schools, and other educational institutions that provide services to the people of the respective raion, as well as the methodical work and other activities in the education area and in the social care field¹³. These decentralized

¹³ Law on the Administrative Decentralization, no.435 from 28.12.2006

services are areas of influence of the raion leadership in rural Moldova.

At the same time, it is important to mention that the number of raion presidents is a matter of image for political parties, which demonstrates the power and influence of political parties at the local level. However, there was a big difference between the statements of the party leaders and the raion coalitions' final structure or

the voting for the election of the raion leadership. In the following, we will show that although there were good conditions for the creation of coalitions between Liberal Democrats and Democrats in several raion councils, the state of affairs proved to be very often totally different from what the leaders of PLDM and PDM stated. The formation of raion coalitions has been characterized by mutual exclusion of the Liberal Democrats and Democrats from several alliances created at the local level.

Table 2. Election of raion council presidents

Political parties									
Raion	PLDM	PD	PL	PPEM	PCRM	PSRM	PN	President, representative of	
Anenii Noi (33 seats)	9	-	3	1 out of 2	5			PLDM	
Briceni (33 seats)	6	9	1		3	2 out of 9		PD	
Cahul (35 seats)	9	7	3					PLDM	
Cantemir (33 seats)	1 out of 11	8	3	3	4			PD	
Călărași (33 seats)	10	9	3	2 out of 4	2			PLDM	
Căușeni (33 seats)	10	-	2		6			PLDM	
Cimișlia (33 seats)	-	7	-	10	1 out of 3			PPEM	
Criuleni (33 seats)	-	6	5	2	5			PD	
Dondușeni (27 seats)	5	7	1		4			PD	
Drochia (33 seats)	5	6	-	1	5	3 out of 6		PD	
Dubăsari (27 seats)	-	5			10			PCRM	
Edineț (33 seats)	-	9	1		4	3 out of 6		PD	
Fălești (33 seats)	5	6	-	1	4	1 out of 5		PD	
Florești (33 seats)	-	8	1	1	7			PD	
Glodeni (33 seats)	5	10	2	1				PD	
Hâncești (35 seats)	-	10	3	2	3	3		PD	
Ialoveni (35 seats)	13	-	5		1 out of 2			PLDM	
Leova (33 seats)	9	2 out of 12	-	1	4	3		PLDM	
Nisporeni (33 seats)	-	15		2	2	1		PD	
Orhei (35 seats)	-	9	6	4		3		PD	
Ocnîța (33 seats)					8	9	6	PSRM	
Rezina (27 seats)	2 out of 6	11	-		4			PD	
Râșcani (33 seats)		7	1		2	1		PD	
Sângerei (33 seats)	-	8			5	5		PD	
Soroca (33 seats)	9	6	1	2				PLDM	
Strășeni (33 seats)	-	9	6	1 out of 5	3	1 out of 2		PD	
Șoldănești (27 seats)	-	10	2	1	3	1 out of 2		PD	
Ștefan Vodă (33 seats)	10	10	-					PD	
Taraclia (27 seats)						10	6	PSRM	
Telenești (33 seats)	13	10	1		2	1		PLDM	
Ungheni (35 seats)	-	7	3	1	4	3 out of 5		PD*	

Source: compiled by the author based on the information from the websites of the raion councils, PLDM (www.pldm.md) and PDM (www.pdm.md).

* The president of the Ungheni raion was voted also by two independent councillors

The data in this table do not include the situation in the Basarabeasca raion council, because, as of September 14, the governing bodies of this raion had not been elected yet. This table shows the number of the councillors who participated in the establishment of the governing bodies. Also, these figures explain the process of

parties' participation in the voting of the raion council presidents. It should be mentioned that the election of presidents and vice presidents didn't always result in the establishment of alliances¹⁴ or not all the parties that

¹⁴ <http://unimedia.info/stiri/presedintele-raionului-leova-a-fost-ales-fara-o-coalitie-locala-declarata--doar-2-din-12-democrati-au->

participated in the voting of the raion leadership have decided to join the raion alliance¹⁵. PDM and PLDM have obtained most of the raion president mandates - 19 and 8 respectively. The Democrats are by far leaders in this respect, twice ahead of the Liberal Democrats. It is an important change compared to the results obtained by the political parties in the 2011 local elections, when PLDM was leading with 15 seats, the Communist Party having obtained 10 mandates of president, PDM -6 and PL – only one¹⁶. It is true that subsequently, coalitions in several raions had been reset, Democrats having, for example, 11 raion presidents at the end of the mandate¹⁷.

It should be noted that the leaders of the PLDM and PDM territorial organizations didn't take into account, in many cases, the call of their party presidents to create raion alliances with the parties of the ruling coalition. If we refer to the number of seats obtained by the two parties in the raions in which they placed on the top two positions according to the number of councillors, we can see that the votes of both parties would have been sufficient to create coalitions at the raion level in several towns where the final structure of the majority involved the exclusion of one of the two parties. Also, in some other cases, it would have taken 1 or 2 votes from other political parties to be able to form a raion coalition. In total, 15 raions have been identified where PLDM and PDM could have created raion coalitions together (Cantemir, Causeni, Criuleni, Hancesti, Ialoveni, Nisporeni, Orhei, Soldanesti, and Ungheni) or by the help of another pro-European party (Anenii Noi, Edinet, Floresti, Riscani, Singerei, and Strășeni). We refer to such structures of the second level where the Liberal Democrats or Democrats have created raion coalitions with other political parties. It is important to note that, on the other hand, the Liberal Democrats and the Democrats have effectively collaborated and created coalitions in several raions where they obtained

modest results in the local elections. Alliances were formed in such raions as Drochia, Falesti and Briceni.

The leaders of the ruling parties have been criticized for the way the negotiations have evolved in the formation of raion coalitions, as well as in election of the raion leadership in several towns such as Criuleni, Orhei and Causeni. Thus PLDM has emphasized that “some parties follow narrow interests and intend to bring PSRM and PN in power at the raion level”, referring to the negotiations on the election of the Criuleni president¹⁸. Also, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, Vlad Filat, has criticized the situation in the Orhei raion council, characterizing it as “regrettable”¹⁹. In turn, the Liberal Democrats has also excluded the Democrats from the equation of the raion leadership election in several towns such as Causeni and Ialoveni. As mentioned above, both political parties have excluded each other at the local level, neglecting the call of the party leaders to build pro-European alliances in the raion councils.

The first impression is that, despite the official statements of the party leaders to create pro-European coalitions at the local level, there might have existed directives from the party headquarters to exclude, whenever possible, PDM or, where appropriate, PLDM from the raion structures. It is a point of view that should not be neglected, though it is difficult to prove. In these circumstances, we should point out that there were several subjective factors invoked by the leaders of the PDM and PLDM territorial organizations that determined the structure of the majority at the raion level. At the same time, according to the interviews with the presidents of raions, there have been no directives from the party headquarters to exclude PDM or PLDM from the local alliance formula. In the following, we will discuss some reasons why the pro-European parties have excluded each other in the formation of majorities at the raion level.

votat-97481.html

¹⁵ <http://unimedia.info/stiri/presedintele-raionului-leova-a-fost-ales-fara-o-coalitie-locala-declarata--doar-2-din-12-democrati-au-votat-97481.html>

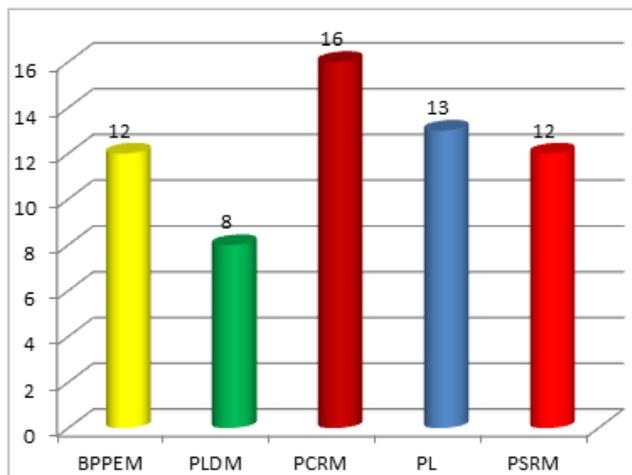
¹⁶ <http://unimedia.info/stiri/infografie-presedinti-de-raion-pldm---14--pcrm---10--pd---6--pl---1-37001.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.pdm.md/ro/echipa/pdm-la-conducerea-raioanelor>

¹⁸ Press release. <http://pldm.md/stiri?start=50>

¹⁹ <http://ziarulnational.md/vlad-filat-insista-pe-un-punct-nou-in-acordul-viitoareii-alianta-ce-spune-despre-premier-si-membrii-noului-guvern/>

Chart 1. PDM partners in the election of raion presidents



Source: made by the author based on the information of the PLDM website (www.pldm.md) and that of the PDM (www.pdm.md).

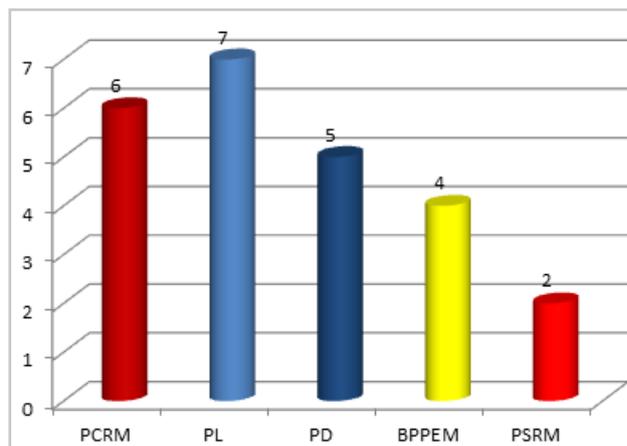
This chart shows the support given by the political parties to the Democrats' candidates for the president of the raion councils. Every participation in the voting of the representatives of political parties has been taken into account, including the vote of a councillor from a larger number of mandates that were obtained or voted against. We can observe that the Communists, Liberals and the PSRM and BPPEM councillors voted mostly for the PDM candidate. It is surprising that the Socialists have supported the Democrats' candidates more often than the Liberal Democrats did. Mention should be made that the PSRM councillors voted without the endorsement of their party leadership which excluded coalitions with the ruling parties – PLDM, PDM, and PL- after the June local elections²⁰.

Very often the Socialists' votes were rather symbolic than needed for the election of the raion leadership. In other words, in several cases, the Socialists' votes were not decisive for the election of the raion councils' presidents. PSRM councillors' votes were important for PDM in 5 cases: Edinet, Falesti, Singerei, Riscani, and Ungheni. This situation is reflected in the number of vice presidents (Sângerei) obtained by the socialist councillors who voted for a Democratic president. The alliance created in Falesti, where a socialist councillor joined the Democrats to secure a majority, provoked fierce criticism from the PN leader, Renato Usatâi,

²⁰ <http://socialistii.md/liderii-psrm-au-comentat-rezultatele-alegerilor-in-republica-si-in-chisinau/>

against the socialists for having voted for the Democratic candidates²¹. Subsequently, PSRM excluded many local socialist councillors from the party, because they voted for the pro-European parties' representatives²².

Chart 2. PLDM partners in the election of raion presidents



Source: compiled by the author based on the information from the websites of the raion councils, PLDM (www.pldm.md) and PDM (www.pdm.md).

We can see also in the case of the Liberal Democrats that their candidates for the raion president have been mainly supported by the Liberals and Communists. It should be noted that in at least three cases (Ialoveni, Telenești and Calarasi) the Communists' votes were not decisive. However, it must be mentioned that there isn't a big difference between the number of cases in which PCRM and PL supported election of the Liberal Democratic raion presidents, on the one hand, and the raion presidents of the BPPEM and PDM, on the other hand. In 4 out of 5 cases, the votes of the Democrats were crucial for the election of the Liberal Democratic candidates. However, it should be underlined that in many raions, where PLDM has achieved the best results, PDM has removed the Liberal Democrats from the governing bodies, creating coalitions with other political parties. Such was the case in Criuleni, Cantemir, Hincesti, Ungheni, Floresti and Riscani. The election of president in the raion of Râșcani occurred under different conditions compared to other places. Thus,

²¹ <http://ru1.md/ro/vozmushhen-povedeniem-sotsialistov/>

²² <http://socialistii.md/organele-colegiale-ale-partidului-socialistilor-au-decis-excluderea-din-formatiune-a-tuturor-persoanelor-care-au-incalcat-principiile-partidului-si-au-votat-in-comun-cu-reprezentantii-oligarhilor-din/>

on August 24, 11 out of 17 councillors present at the meeting voted for the representative of the Democrats²³. The representatives of Socialists voted twice for the raion president of the Liberal Democrats, but the PSRM vote really counted only in the election of the Leova raion administrative bodies.

Analysing the behaviour of Liberal Democrats and Democrats at the local level, characterized by mutual exclusion from several raion councils, there are several explanations for this that have been suggested during the interviews.

First, this situation is a continuation of the history of formations of raion coalitions after the June 2011 local elections. At the end of 2013, there were 12 majority coalitions at the raion level created between PLDM and PCRM or PDM and PCRM, after the first attempts in Orhei and Ialoveni to create pro-European alliances²⁴. On 12 March 2014, the leaders of the Liberal Democrats and Liberal Reformers announced the decision to set up pro-European coalitions at the local level²⁵, which was not realized until the 2015 local elections.

Secondly, after talks with the raion presidents from PLDM and PDM, both parties have invoked a state of distrust between the two parties. This situation is explained by the fact that after the local elections, although there were agreements, in principle, between the Liberal Democrats and Democrats to create raion majorities, in several cases both parties held hidden negotiations with other political parties. This duplicitous attitude has led, according to the interviewees, to creation of coalitions with other parties. There exist at least two public acknowledgments by the PDM²⁶ and PLDM²⁷ representatives about hidden negotiations held by potential members of the coalition with representatives of other political parties.

²³ <http://www.riscani.md/?pag=news&copa=view&id=271&tip=stiri&start=&di=>

²⁴ Veaceslav Berbeca, Consequences of the referenda from UTA Găgăuzia on several raions of the Republic of Moldova, IDIS "Viitorul"/FES, Policy Brief, April 2014, p.13; <http://www.viitorul.org/doc.php?l=ro&idc=295&id=4371&t=/STUDII-IDIS/Politica/Consecintele-referendumurilor-din-UTA-Gagauzia-asu-pra-unor-raioane-din-R-Moldova>

²⁵ <http://www.ipn.md/ro/politica/60572>

²⁶ <http://vox.publika.md/politica/tentativa-pldm-de-a-musamaliza-eseurile-echipei-de-la-criuleni-si-nu-doar-521100.html>

²⁷ <http://www.europalibera.mobi/a/27114940.html>

Thirdly, in many cases, personal relationships took precedence over the call of party leaders to create alliances at the raion level. As mentioned above, in the previous term, both parties resorted to the support of the Communists in order to create raion alliances, which has strained the relations between the two political parties in several administrative units of the second level. There are at least two cases that are perfect examples of such situations. It's about Cantemir, where on 12 June 2012, the raion president, which was a PLDM representative, was dismissed through the common vote of the PL, PCRM and PDM factions being replaced with a representative of the Democrats. The second case happened in Causeni, where on 19 September 2012, the representative of the Democratic Party, elected in office in July 2011 with the votes of the Democrats, Communists, Liberals and of an independent councillor, was dismissed by the Liberal Democrats, the Communists and three independent councils and replaced by a PLDM representative.

Fourth, in the discussions with the representatives of these parties, both Democrats and Liberal Democrats have brought mutual accusations. The PDM representatives accused the Liberal Democrats of lack of flexibility in the negotiation process on creation of raion majorities and election of the raion president. In other words, in several raions, the Liberal Democrats insisted upon their candidacy for the president. Other accusations brought during the interviews against the Liberal Democrats refer to their authoritarian and opaque behaviour in the process of the raion activities management. In this context, it is interesting to note that PLDM lost the leadership in several raions as Orhei, Singerei, Criuleni, Hancesti, Briceni, Ungheni, Drochia, Glodeni, Cimislia, Râșcani and Straseni. In turn, the representatives of the Liberal Democrats said in the interviews that we can talk about an organized exclusion of the PLDM representatives by the Democrats in most raions. A second major accusation made by the Liberal Democrats against the PDM representatives is that the latter used different unorthodox methods to determine the counsellors of other parties to vote for the Democrats.

Finally, it should be mentioned that in the territorial units of the second level, where there have been no options for manoeuvre, the representatives of the two parties worked together in order to create pro-European

majorities. A successful illustration of this case is the situation in the raions of Briceni, Donduseni, Drochia, Falesti, Glodeni, and Soroca. Obviously, there were

also complicated situations for these parties, such as, for example, Edinet, but in this raion the majority was created with the help of the PSRM representatives.

Table 3. The administrative positions held by political parties in the raion councils*

	PLDM	PDM	PSRM	PCRM	PN	PL	BPPEM
Representativeness of parties in the raion councils	32	32	32	32	27	29	25
Raion councillors	256	256	138	132	106	74	60
Positions of president/ vice president	8/10	19/16	2/3	1/20	0/2	0/16	1/6
Participation in coalitions	16	26	16**	24	2	20	17

*Data is not complete, because in some raions (Basarabasca) the president was not elected and in other raions- vice presidents were not elected (Basarabasca, Râșcani)

**PSRM has excluded formation of local alliances with the ruling parties. These data reflect with 2 exceptions coalitions with the ruling parties of PSRM

Source: compiled by the author based on the information from the websites of the raion councils, the Central Election Commission www.cec.md, PLDM (www.pldm.md) and PDM (www.pdm.md).

According to this table, four parties (PLDM, PDM, PSRM and PCRM) obtained mandates in all 32 districts, followed by PL, PN and BPPEM. However, more relevant from the perspective of coalition potential is the number of councillors obtained by the political parties in the June 2015 local elections. Thus, even if they are represented in each raion, the Socialists and Communists obtained twice fewer councillors than the Liberal Democrats and Democrats²⁸. However, not even these figures fully explain the success of political parties in the adjudication of the positions of the raion president and vice-president. For example, PCRM is virtually equal to PLDM in terms of administrative positions, while PL has only several functions fewer than the Liberal Democrats who had much better results than the Liberals in the local elections.

The functions obtained by PCRM and PL are explained by the fact that even if they ranked third and fourth according to the number of seats obtained in the raion councils, they were in the position of the political parties defined as “parties with potential coalition “or” blackmail potential”²⁹. This situation allowed them to manoeuvre through the disagreements between PDM and PLDM and negotiate favourable conditions for them in several administrative units of the second level.

The defining element in the number of positions of the raion president and vice president obtained by the political parties is the participation in the raion coalitions or majorities. The Democrats are undisputed leaders, having participated 26 times in the voting of the raion administration, which gave them 19 positions of president and 16 of vice president. It should be noted that in some cases (Telenești, Cahul, Cimislia)³⁰ the Democrats obtained two vice president positions, while in some raions, apart from the president position, they got also a vice president position (Nisporeni, Briceni, Glodeni, Ungheni)³¹. Calarasi is the only raion where PDM participated in the election of the administration without obtaining any function.

PCRM and PL have fewer administrative positions in relation to the number of participations in the election of the raion presidents or vice presidents. This situation is explained by the fact that, often, as shown in Table 2, the vote of these political parties didn't count in the election process of the raion leadership. PLDM, the party with the largest number of councillors (equal to PDM), has participated only 15 times in the election of the raion leadership. This includes the vote in Cantemir (1 out of 11) and Rezina (2 out of 6) which didn't bring positions of raion vice president to the party. However, in some raions, the Liberal Democrats obtained several positions of vice president (Glodeni, Stefan Voda, Donduseni, and Falesti)³².

²⁸ The number of councillors obtained by parties in the June 2015 elections, without taking into account the situation when the councillors subsequently joined other political parties

²⁹ Arend Lijphard, *Models of democracy. The forms of government in 36 countries*, Iași: Polirom, 2000, p. 77

³⁰ Websites of the raion council, PDM and PLDM

³¹ Websites of the raion council, PDM and PLDM

³² The websites of PDM and PLDM

PSRM and PN have obtained the fewest positions of president or vice president. The Socialists who participated several times in the raion leadership election, voted in violation of the party discipline. They obtained the offices of president in the raions where they teamed up with PN and PCRM and where the pro-European parties obtained few votes.

It is interesting to note that the Democrats obtained the function of president in all the raions where they placed first by the number of mandates obtained, except for the Leova raion (10 of out of 11). The results of the Liberal Democrats were more modest, they managing to obtain the post of president in 7 out of 13 raions where they ranked first according to the number of seats.

Conclusions

- The leadership positions in the raion councils are of utmost importance for political parties as they are an important element of political, economic or social influence in rural Moldova. They also give an indication of the importance and power of the political parties as well as of their image on the Moldovan political scene. Thus, it is natural for the political parties to want to lead the raions or be part of the raion alliances.
- The governing political parties were able to achieve good results in the election of raion councillors despite the pessimistic scenarios because of the economic, social and political problems of the country. Given the results of the local elections, PLDM, PDM and PL announced the creation of pro-European alliances at the raion level. However, given the way in which the governing bodies were elected in many raions, the political parties - DPM and PLDM- have led a hidden fight against each other rather than collaborated in obtaining leadership positions in the raion councils.
- Despite the fact that the representatives of the political parties have excluded the existence of directives from the party headquarters regarding the creation of coalitions, saying they have full autonomy in creating alliances, the mutual exclusion from the raion majorities indicates an influence of the party leadership on the territorial organizations when it comes to the coalition options.
- The way in which alliances have been established in several raion councils demonstrates an attitude of mistrust between the Democrats and Liberal Democrats at the local level. Moreover, the representatives of these parties have brought accusations against each other that determined the format of the raion coalitions. This suggests the existence of strained personal relations between the local leaders, which has influenced the way the raion majorities were established.
- Mention should be made that in more complicated situations, the coalitions at the raion level included one of the governing coalition parties, the local leaders having been able to work together effectively in creating such majorities. We refer to such raions as Briceni, Donduseni, Drochia, Falesti, Glodeni, and Soroca.
- Although the Liberals and Communists have achieved more modest results than the Liberal Democrats when it comes to the number of raion councillors, they played an important role in the creation of coalitions, performing difficult political tightropes resulting in a significant number of raion vice presidents. Both the PL and PCRM councillors were easy to negotiate with in the process of choosing the coalition partners. It should be noted that also the BPPPEM representatives have participated actively in the process of forming raion alliances within their limits.
- PSRM and PLDM seem to be the main losers when it comes to the raion majorities. The Liberal Democrats are included in this category, because they obtained twice as fewer raion president positions than in the previous term. Also, although PLDM ranked first in 13 raions and second in 11 other raions by the number of raion councillors, it obtained only 8 raion president positions. As to PSRM, despite the statements of the party leader that the socialists would not participate in the raion alliances with the ruling parties, in many cases, the socialist councillors voted for the PDM and PLDM candidates, which has questioned the quality of monolithic party of the Socialists.

- The mystery of the raion leadership election results is PN. The representatives of this party did not vote for any candidate of the Democrats and Liberal Democrats. There are three explanations for this situation. First, the PN councillors had a firm position in this respect.

Secondly, the PN councillors have not received acceptable offers, for example, positions of raion vice presidents, in order to support candidates of the ruling parties. Finally, it is likely that there was no need for the PN councillors' contribution to create alliances.