

## **Moldova's political phenomenon: how much longer will oligarchs and criminals stay in power?**

As the debate on the upcoming Ukrainian elections is at the top of the agenda in Europe, many experts are closely looking at Moldova where the parliamentary elections are to be held on February, 24. According to the preliminary results, the majority of seats will likely be shared among the three major political parties- the opposition Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, known for its pro-Russian political compass, the ACUM party which is highly supported by the EU, and the ruling Democratic party with its leader Vladimir Plahotniuc.

According to the public poles made by the International Republican Institute based in the USA, the current political regime in Moldova is largely opposed by the national majority. Moreover, known for its corruption and multiple financial crimes, the Plahotniuc's party is neither supported by Moscow, nor by the EU. Incredible it may be, but it seems that Vladimir Plahotniuc is still going to keep his political power. The "Shor" party named after its leader Ilan Shor, a well-known businessman in Moldova and beyond, may become the Plahotniuc's new hope.

Notorious for his shady networking with Russia and Israel as well as huge financial damages caused to a number of banks in Russia, Ilan Shor is banned to enter Russia since 2015. At the same time, Shor was sued in his home country Moldova for multiple financial crimes and was convicted to 7,5 years in jail. Earlier in 2014, Shor designed a scheme that allowed him to withdraw \$1 billion (around 12% of the country's GDP) to the offshore territories through the Moldavian banks. All banks involved in the scheme were controlled by Ilan Shor. For instance, he was the Board Chairman of the Banca de Economii and a bank stockholder of the Banca Sociala and Unibank. However, Shor was able to escape the penalty. He provided the evidence that showed the real guilty was Vlad Filat, the ex-Prime Minister of Moldova. Meanwhile, Ilan Shor continued his political career and in 2015 he became a city mayor of Orrhei. With Shor's political ranks going upper every year, Plahotniuc has all the chances to win the elections again.

The ongoing political discourse and the race for parliamentary seats in Chisinau is often compared with the farce as the result seems quite predictable. The Moldova's path towards democracy is yet a way too blur unless the international law blocks the political criminals who continue to rule the country by weakening its economy and national resources.

*By Olga Malik*

*For EU Reporter*