

Interview with Dumitru Braghiș

Dumitru Braghiș was prime minister of Moldova and is currently the leader of the Moldova Noastra faction in parliament, the third largest faction of deputies. Moldova Noastra recently entered into an electoral alliance with two other centrist parties to form the Moldova Democrata bloc. This interview was conducted in Chișinău on August 31, 2004, by *Demokratizatsiya* founder Fredo Arias-King.

Demokratizatsiya: How do you see the general atmosphere here in Moldova, a few months before the general elections? Do you think the Communist Party will keep its super majority, will it decrease to a simple majority, or do you think they may even lose the majority?

Braghiș: Well, it depends on many things. It's too early to say whether they will lose or whether they will have the majority in parliament. What is clear for me is that, in the last year, I think that they have started to lose their popularity; they have begun to lose some of the results that they had achieved in the previous years. More and more people are beginning to understand that not all that had been announced before reflects the real situation. And because of this, the position of the Communist Party is not what it was ten or fifteen months ago.

Demokratizatsiya: Even in that short period of time you have noticed a decline?

Braghiș: But at the same time, it does not mean that this will have a negative impact on the elections. The popularity of their leader [Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin] is still too high, and this may cause a lot of problems for us, I mean for the democratic parties, because of many reasons. First of all, they have total control over the media. And this is perhaps the main problem, because we do not have access to the media, to the national media. And the second question is that we cannot say that we have an independent judiciary system.

Demokratizatsiya: Everybody is complaining about that.

Braghiș: When you have problems and you need to go to the courts and the courts are independent, then you cannot complain. But when the court is controlled by the Communist Party, then it's clear that it's almost impossible. I think that these two questions—the independence of the media and the impartiality of the judiciary system—are the most important. Other important questions involve what will be the results of these elections.

Demokratizatsiya: Do you think there will be outright electoral fraud?

Braghiș: I am sure. We had fraud in 2001 when the Communists were not in power. Now that they are in power with the possibility to control everything, such as the Central Electoral Committee and half of the primaries [regional governments], then it's clear that we will have fraud.

Demokratizatsiya: What measures can you take against this electoral fraud?

Braghiș: First of all, we have to try and change the laws. There is a possibility to change the laws in order to have a more transparent way to organize these elections; not necessarily campaigning, but activities that must be done by the state—such as the printing of the ballots, the organizing of the voting, the counting of the votes at the end of the process—are the main ones. At the same time, we must request observers for the elections, how they can be used to influence the situation.

Demokratizatsiya: Would Moldova Democrata be willing to form a coalition with the PPCD [Christian Democratic People's Party] after the elections in order to form a government?

Braghiș: Generally speaking yes, but it depends on many things. I think the question with the PPCD is [that] they finally have to determine with whom they are going to cooperate, because if you look at the newspapers of the PPCD, if you look at the actions that they take, you would think that the enemies of the PPCD are [Chișinău mayor and Moldova Noastra leader Serafim] Urechean or Braghiș, let's say Moldova Democrata, and not the Communists. And if they continue in such a way, it will be very difficult to have that coalition. At the same time, this doesn't mean that we will have a coalition with the Communists.

Demokratizatsiya: There is a possibility that you will form a coalition with the Communists?

Braghiș: No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

Demokratizatsiya: I remember an article in the newspaper *Flux* a few months ago where PPCD leader Iurie Roșca was proposing a ceasefire between the democratic forces, to concentrate all efforts against the Communists. Did that have an effect? Did that ceasefire hold?

Braghiș: In order to answer this, you have to just look at *Flux* in the past few months and you will see there that the enemies of the country are Braghiș and Urechean. But all the declarations seem to be political or electoral in nature, not those that represent their real views.

Demokratizatsiya: I heard that Voronin asked you to become prime minister and that you declined.

Braghiș: No, no. We had some discussions with Mr. Voronin concerning the situation in the country. Officially, I had a name, it was not said clearly, something like this. But no. And I don't see that I am going to accept this.

Demokratizatsiya: You were already prime minister once under President Petru Lucinschi . . .

Braghiș: But it's not a question of me being prime minister before. The question is that in order to be prime minister, you need the possibility to work, and in this case it's impossible. Why should I accept a job which is nothing?

Demokratizatsiya: Did you feel that your hands were tied under Lucinschi, or did you have more room to maneuver?

Braghiș: No, of course not. Well, half the time Lucinschi was chief of the executive, but even at that time I had more freedom I think than [Prime Minister Vasile] Tarlev has now.

Demokratizatsiya: Some of your critics mention that when Russian President Vladimir Putin was here in Moldova for a CIS summit on October 4, 2002, there was a vote to abide by a treaty that would subjugate Moldova's foreign policy to the CIS structures and to Russia, and that both the Communists and your faction also voted in favor of this. Do you recall that?

Braghiș: I don't think so. At that time we ratified some of the CIS agreements and voted in favor, but this is another question. I don't remember this. But frankly speaking, the CIS is almost dead. Even Russia is trying to leave from some of these agreements. I think that Moldova has to leave all these CIS agreements gradually and approve a timetable for leaving all these agreements. It's difficult to do this suddenly, to cut everything off, but we have to prepare for this.

Demokratizatsiya: Last year you mentioned to me that NATO expansion towards the borders of Moldova is a stabilizing force. Would you be willing to one day consider Moldova's entry into NATO and the EU?

Braghiș: Concerning NATO, that would be more problematic because we would have to change the constitution. Maybe it will not be a problem, but officially, from the legal point of view, today it is an issue.

Demokratizatsiya: But politically you would be so inclined?

Braghiș: Politically yes, I think it would be acceptable. And, concerning the European Union, there are no political questions or legal questions, because all the polls and all the declarations of the political parties demonstrate that European integration is one of the main goals of the political parties and the population.

Demokratizatsiya: Even of the Communist Party. I remember last year when you, Iurie Roșca, and Communist Party parliamentary faction leader Stepaniuc traveled together to Brussels to jointly request the EU to consider Moldova as a candidate for EU integration.

Braghiș: Yes, and we signed some documents together, our parliamentary factions.

Demokratizatsiya: Speaking of factions, your faction started with more members [19] than it has now [9]. What happened?

Braghiș: Well, some of them left. Federalization in Moldova represents something bad, something wrong, something not good. Today we cannot speak about federalization as a solution, as something that can be supported by the majority of the population. Even if there are a few people that understand what is real federalization, at the same time the majority of the population doesn't support it, even if they are not against it. What is going to happen? What will be the result? Frankly speaking, I don't think we have to close all the discussions about the federalization. I think we have to discuss this issue more attentively, and explain better what federalization means. It is for sure that the document proposed by [Dmitry] Kozak will not be supported. But, at the same time, if we speak about a federation of five, ten, or even fifteen participants, why not? But again, according to the latest polls, federalization is not a solution with the majority of the population. And in this case, while we have to speak about it, we have to find a new way or we have to start a new campaign to explain what federalization means first of all, how it will work, what the difference is between the Kozak document and real federalization, or possible federalization for the county. And you see that the latest developments in the Transnistrian issue show quite clearly that, first of all, the authorities there are not interested in finding a solution for the situation, and I think they used very well the mistakes of [Moldovan President Vladimir] Voronin, in that he was at first in favor, then did not sign the [Kozak] document, and because of this situation the Transnistrians became more closed. And as a result, the relations between Moscow and Chișinău were better a year ago and Chișinău had bigger support; now I think that many politicians from Moscow support Tiraspol more than Chișinău. And this will have a negative impact for the possible solution to the Transnistrian issue.

Demokratizatsiya: Now that federalization is a bad word as you say, and now that the OSCE has been discredited and Moscow supports Tiraspol more, and Voronin seems to be moving away from Moscow, how do you propose to solve the Transnistria problem? I assume that nothing can be done until after the next elections, right?

Braghîş: It's clear that, in order to start a new round of negotiations, we have to change at least one of the two leaders, [de facto leader of Transnistria regime Igor] Smirnov or Voronin. In order to develop something, we need to have a dialogue. There is no dialogue today between Tiraspol and Chişinău. And this is the main problem. You cannot solve the problem by not speaking to them. In the past months, Voronin announced a lot of initiatives, like the stability pact for Moldova, that he will conduct negotiations with Russia and not with Tiraspol, like the blockade. The problem is that these decisions and initiatives were not prepared beforehand. I have a feeling that they announce these initiatives just for the sake of announcing them, not to have them implemented. This is my main opinion about this.

Demokratizatsiya: Anything else you would like to add?

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Braghîş: The main problem, in my view, is the issue of free and fair elections. And for this reason I think we must receive some support from the international community, because the Communists are not interested in changing the laws, and are interested in keeping things as is, and they made some declarations. For example, Voronin announced that he is ready to have free and fair elections, and not to use the assets of the state, such as TV and radio and such things, and to share them with other political parties. But at that time, another official from the Communist Party said just the opposite. And this is a question that, from my point of view, many Western partners did not appreciate the situation as it is. They listened to the words but did not look into the actions taken by the authorities.

Demokratizatsiya: Such as Teleradio Moldova, the independence of the judiciary . . .

Braghîş: There are many things. The Communist Party leaders make very good declarations, but very poor implementation of these and, in many cases, even regression. In my view, this is the biggest problem the country is facing, and also for the Western partners that did not appreciate the situation here.

Demokratizatsiya: What else should they be paying attention to besides the media, the judiciary, and the independence of the electoral commission?

Braghîş: In order to have those issues you mention resolved, we have to change a lot of laws, or at least some laws. We have proposed this many times, but the Communists do not accept these amendments to these laws. We have to think what will happen in the embassies of the Republic of Moldova abroad, because

I think a lot of fraud will occur there. From my point of view, a lot of things were approved and almost nothing has been implemented. The law on public television has also been approved, but it has been two years and the law has not been implemented. You can say in Strasbourg that everything is approved, but then nothing is in place.

Demokratizatsiya: What do you think about the ongoing protests at the Telera-dio Moldova building?

Braghiș: We support the protests. I think that in general we see a lot of mistakes and a lot of violation of the laws in the reorganization of the national television. And what is happening now is normal from my point of view. I even sometimes have the feeling that it's too late, that [the protesters] waited too long. Frankly speaking, I support the ideas of the protesters. We can speak about the faults, we can speak about some concrete details, but in general I support what is happening at the national television building—and the demands to have a democratic and free TV, free from Communist Party control.

Demokratizatsiya: What is happening with the economic reforms in the country recently? Has there been progress or regression?

Braghiș: In some cases, anti-reforms have been implemented. First of all in the agricultural sector, the main policy of the Communist Party is to restore the former *kolkhozi* and *sovkhozi*. But, at the same time, we have to say that many decisions were approved and implemented to try to increase the influence of the state in business activities in the country. We can talk about many examples, such as, we cannot export without authorization, we cannot develop business activity without a license, things like these. And it seems as if every month, they come up with new licenses, they try to put everything under control. On the other hand, I think that the independence of the local authorities has been destroyed completely. With the approval of the 2004 budget law, I think that local authorities have, first of all, lost their financial independence, all of them except in Chișinău. According to official data, on January 1, 2004, we had around 2.3 million people employed in the economy. In 2001, we had 2.5 million. Which means that 200,000 jobs were lost, which unfortunately is the policy of the Communist Party. Because of the policy that has been promoted against the biggest investors—and not just foreign but domestic investors as well—there is no investment in the country. And all these problems have consequences. For example, in 1999 we had something like 90 dollars per capita foreign direct investment, and in 2003 we had 11 dollars per capita. It is clear we had economic growth, though we have to look at from which sources this growth came from. But the rate of growth is declining, from 7 to 6 then to 5 percent. The forecast for 2005 shows clearly that the rate of growth continues to decline. Another example, the revenues accruing to the budget, which show economic activity, are also decreasing. Our citizens living abroad are sending back remittances. However, this money is not being

used as investment to start production, for example, because they don't pay enough attention to private initiative, and sometimes the opposite. At first, they tried to destroy, to kill private initiative. This money is used to buy apartments, cars, or to buy products from abroad. As a result, imports are twice as high as exports. Which begs the question, is the economy really growing or not?

Demokratizatsiya: It reminds me of Mexico. These symptoms begin to appear before some kind of an economic and financial crash.

Braghîş: If you look at the economic figures, we can say that maybe in two years there will be an economic crash, if they continue in such a way.

Demokratizatsiya: Has civil society improved or declined? I noticed there is an initiative by several NGOs that formed an alliance with the main opposition parties last year to defeat the Kozak Memorandum, and this year they are also very active in trying to clean a little bit of the atmosphere towards the elections early next year. This seems like a positive sign. How do you see the tendencies in civil society?

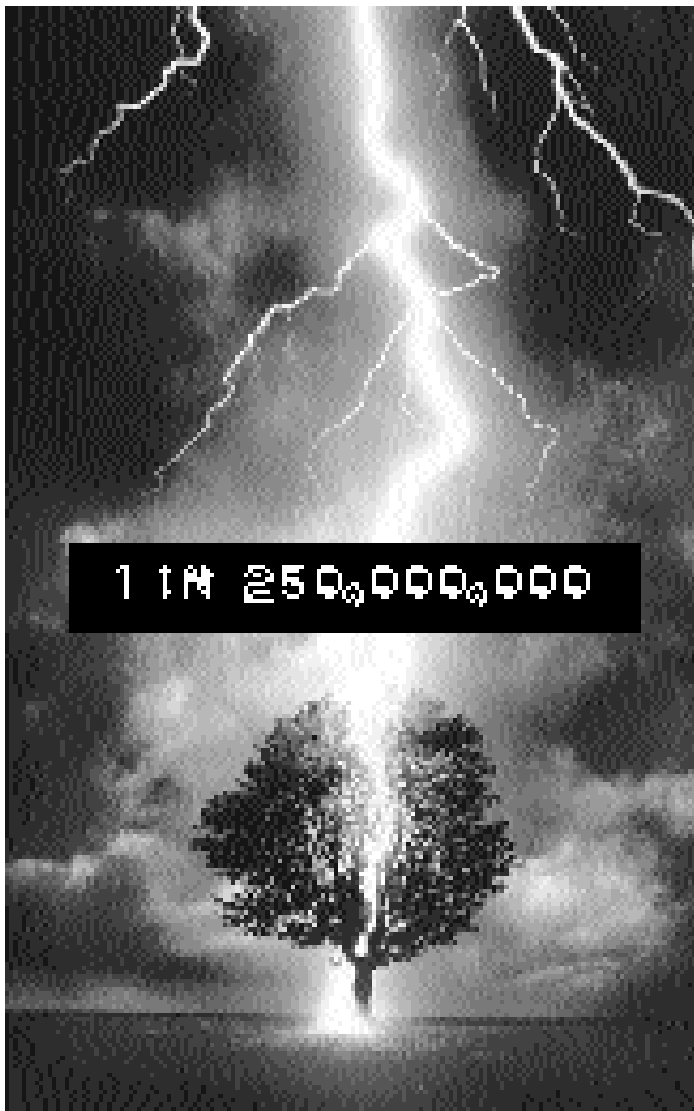
Braghîş: In general, civil society has increased and developed a lot in the last year, and this is also because of the support of foreigners, of the international community. What I feel is that European integration, the democratization of the country, the market economy—these are the main areas where these NGOs are active. Now of course with the coming elections, more attention will be paid to these elections, and as you mention this is the initiative of many NGOs. Through this initiative, civil society shows that it is interested in having free and fair elections, and we can say about civil society in connection with TV and radio. Unfortunately we can say that while we have a huge number of NGOs, not all of them are active and not all of them are oriented towards the questions of democratization. And this is a problem.

Demokratizatsiya: Is Voronin interfering with civil society in some kind of active way?

Braghîş: Not only Voronin. It's difficult to say it's only Voronin. If you speak about the Communist Party in general, then yes, the Communist Party tried to bring part of this civil society to their side, and when they failed to do this, then they decided to establish different alternatives, let's say.

Demokratizatsiya: I believe they are called "GONGOs," government NGOs.

Braghîş: We can say so, yes. For example, human rights, new trade unions, union of journalists, and things like this. When they cannot install Communist Party control at these NGOs or these unions, then in this case they try to build up new ones. And some of them have appeared already.



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