

The Democrats Must Cooperate

INTERVIEW WITH IURIE ROȘCA

Iurie Roșca is the chairman of the Christian Democratic People's Party (PPCD) of Moldova, the main opposition party in parliament. Active in independence and anticommunist issues since 1988, Roșca was a leader at the Popular Front of the Moldavian SSR, the forerunner to the PPCD. This interview was conducted in Chișinău on September 1, 2004, by *Demokratizatsiya* founder Fredo Arias-King.

Demokratizatsiya: You are the leader of the largest opposition to the Communist Party in parliament. The possibility for the PPCD to form an alliance with other non-communist forces, such as Moldova Democrata, after the next elections is often speculated both inside Moldova and in other countries. In my interview with Dumitru Braghiș yesterday, he mentioned that he is not against entering into an alliance, after the elections, with the PPCD to build a government. At the same time, he did not see it as a real possibility to build such an alliance with the Communists. Is the PPCD also prepared in that case to enter into an alliance with Moldova Democrata to form a government?

Roșca: Absolutely. Absolutely and without any reservations we are ready to form an alliance with them. I am very glad that the leader of that bloc finally has said what he kept quiet for a long time. We can form that alliance on the basis of a few reform principles for a successful transition, mostly having to do with the strengthening of democratic institutions and reforms in Moldova. And the third element concerns the foreign relations of the country, namely integration with the West.

Demokratizatsiya: You have become quite popular among some circles in Washington, DC, and in Brussels as the leader of the anticommunist opposition in Moldova. Do you think that the West has helped the situation in Moldova in the last two years, since you began an international campaign to obtain more attention for the Moldovan opposition in places like Washington and the European capitals?

Roșca: Yes, I feel that our work has been enhanced since we became members of the Christian Democracy International in 1999 and partners of the European Peo-

ple's Party. Since then I have had, and so have my colleagues, many trips abroad, such as last year's trips to Washington, those to Brussels, London, Rome, Paris, Madrid, and Lisbon, with our Christian Democracy International. Thanks to that cooperation at the European level, we managed to strengthen our position in the European Parliament and also in the Council of Europe. Today everybody in Europe as well as America knows that our country is under a Communist dictatorship, but also that there is a democratic party called PPCD that struggles for democratic freedoms, for a law-based state, and for a European and Euro-Atlantic orientation. We are very content that our Western partners fully trust us and our political positions, specifically on the political issues and issues connected to European organizations. The European Parliament and the Council of Europe always support us. What concerns our contacts in Washington, I think, is that our meetings there last year were important in the sense that our country, which is very small and poorly known, at least was noticed. Everyone that we met received both in verbal and written form our positions concerning the antidemocratic activities of our government and also information about the Russian military occupation of part of our country, and the so-called federalization plan. I think that without this international support and without those efforts, which were supported by our foreign friends, we would not have succeeded in countering Russia's imperial tendencies, the destruction of our state, and the annulment of our declaration of independence and our constitution. In the last three years there have been many successes for the PPCD, as we were able to stop many ill-intentioned plans of the Communist authorities and their masters in Moscow.

Demokratizatsiya: Why do you think that other circles, such as those in the State Department—including the former ambassador here, who never even invited you for a one-on-one meeting with her—and the OSCE, were more critical of you and your work?

Roşca: First of all, it is obvious that I am an uncomfortable figure for many, for the diplomats and the secret services of the Russian Federation, which very effectively work in the territory of our country, and who very effectively attempt to tar Iurie Roşca as an enemy in Western diplomatic circles—and it works sometimes. To counter a Communist dictatorship, to counter the imperial ambitions of the Russian Federation, it is necessary to speak in loud tones, so to speak, and in ways some would consider rude. The political language that we use for this somewhat shocks those people who come from an atmosphere of full freedoms. The diplomats here somewhat live in an aquarium, or like in a greenhouse. So when they see our demonstrations, our protests, our picketing, it raises a few eyebrows with those that listen to Mozart and speak softly. Diplomats oftentimes cannot understand the dilemmas that come with this sort of struggle. But none of those critics has ever been able to formulate concrete complaints or accusations, against myself or the party, that we have engaged in something illegal or non-democratic. Or maybe it's my voice, face, or beard, who knows. This may have happened also because we have not met with many of these Western diplomatic critics. But people have to

talk with each other before formulating a prejudice. Maybe many of these diplomats have built an image of me more from newspaper articles or from reports they receive through e-mail, but they cannot manage to contact me and speak about these things. Those contacts at the State Department have developed a lot out of these myths, about this “strict and intolerant” person.

Demokratizatsiya: If this is of any help, the State Department also thought the same thing about the Mexican democrats, and their crazy leader Vicente Fox. There was this idea, “Why are you opposing the ruling party, if everything in Mexico is fine?” A lot of my friends in Central and East European countries from the liberal right have also complained of the same treatment and behavior. But as one of them said, “If the State Department opposes you, that is only the beginning of the fun.” In the end there are others you can talk to in Washington.

Roșca: However, when we did finally meet with some of those State Department officials, they were surprised that I was a rational individual, and that our positions on the key issues coincide with theirs. Our point of view is based on democratic traditions, on the principles of a rule-based state, on the principles of Western-type freedoms. Once they realize this, it is not that difficult to make friends.

Demokratizatsiya: I remember talking to an American diplomat at the beginning of 2003. He mentioned that the federalization project would happen, that all the world wanted it, and that only you were opposed. He continued that it was “Iurie Roșca against the world.” But in the end, it looks like Iurie Roșca won that first battle. Why do you think the federalization project was defeated at the end of November of 2003? Was it the Transnistrian leader’s opposition? Was it the intervention of some Central European leaders that sympathized with your cause or maybe your lobbying activities in Washington? What happened in the end?

Roșca: We must remember that before my trips to Washington and before my very important contacts in the European Union, many people and many institutions knew only two things about Moldova: That there is a Communist government and that there are Russian troops against the letter of international agreements. Outside of that, there was really nothing else about Moldova. They simply did not have the time to worry about our problems. I understood in those trips that you needed to take people by the hand and explain to them what the problems were, since they were not obvious. That is why many of the people in the West that sympathized with the idea of federalization were honest, good people, but that believed that the Russian diplomats were acting in good faith. Because, on the face of it, the concept of federation is a good one; after all, America, Canada, Switzerland, and such countries have it. So the Russians took advantage of this perception. But if you look at their proposals to federalize Moldova, especially the Kozak Memorandum, it has nothing to do with the federations of the Western democracies that I mentioned. If indeed we succeeded

against the federalization project, it was because we, together with our Western friends who understood the situation here, took the time to patiently explain to the Western officials many times the elementary aspects such as juridical, constitutional, geopolitical, historical, ethnic, and other aspects having to do with the so-called federalization. In the end, I think they understood our arguments which, after all, were structured in a correct juridical and political style, and in good English. We distributed those memorandums in the State Department and other offices around Washington and other Western capitals. In the end, they understood what this was. I think also that the fact that President Voronin did not sign the Kozak Memorandum in the end was because of two basic factors, which may be different by weight. One was the very energetic reaction of the democratic opposition, which founded the Committee to Defend the Independence and Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, and organized mass protests. The other was the very strong and principled position of certain Western countries, mainly the United States, which took a correct position in what concerns the separatist leaders, who after all are citizens of the Russian Federation, and who also pressed Voronin to not make that mistake. Our success, or rather Moldova's success, can be linked to these principled acts by some Western diplomats. I recall the hysterical reaction by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which issued a very critical accusation in the sense that certain people in the West were interfering in the internal affairs of Moldova—as if the internal affairs of Moldova were the same thing as the internal affairs of the Russian Federation! This is an imperial mindset, and unfortunately not all in Moscow have understood that a sovereign country can choose its partners in the international sphere. If we believe that the Western powers are closer to the interests of Moldova, then we will build our relations with those Western powers, while not excluding building constructive and fruitful relations with Russia at the same time.

Demokratizatsiya: The Kozak Memorandum was introduced in mid-November of 2003, and it became clear then what kind of game the Kremlin was playing here. But before that variant, there was the so-called Kiev document, which also contemplated federalization for Moldova. Why do you think Russia, if they thought that they would succeed to federalize Moldova through the Kiev document with the support of the OSCE, decided two weeks before the OSCE Maastricht summit to propose the Kozak Memorandum and sacrifice the Kiev document?

Roșca: I believe that the Putin administration, and first of all Dmitry Kozak, who was mainly responsible for this operation, committed a very primitive and crude diplomatic mistake. They wanted to outsmart the West. They wanted to do their little blitzkrieg before Maastricht. They probably thought that the Kiev document was too moderate, so they took this all or nothing gamble. So they attempted to basically sign this document with Vladimir Putin present, and then go to Maastricht before the Western nations with a *fait accompli*. Then Russia could present itself as the successful broker of this “solution” between both sides, and not the

West, and that both sides invited Russia to guarantee this agreement. Insofar as the Russians realized that the Communist government had both an anti-national, pro-Russian orientation, and also almost absolute power over society, then Mr. Kozak and his assistants from the Russian embassy here in Moldova did not measure the possibility for such rapid and energetic reaction by the opposition. They probably just thought that society would not know. For them, it was enough to discuss with their contacts in the government and the parliament. But when the society reacted in such a way, finally the West woke up and understood fully what kind of a danger this represented, back at the end of November, this so-called federalization with the Kozak plan, and that it was provoking destabilization. So the West was forced to reconsider its views on the so-called federalization, and Russia lost almost everything. I think that the Russians overestimated their possibilities in this country. They probably look at us as a poor, backward, corrupt country controlled by a dictatorial regime, and what could this Iurie Roșca do with his handful of opponents and dissidents; it's not important, they thought. But what was at play were our national interests, our freedom, and it was this psychological factor that made Russia lose.

***“There is a one-sided Cold War
between Chișinău and Bucharest.”***

Demokratizatsiya: Do you think that this process helped to unite the opposition and the civil society of Moldova? I remember when you founded that committee with Braghiș with Chișinău Mayor Serafim Urechean—who was also at the square yelling, “Down with the Communists!”—plus Social-Democratic Party leader Oazu Nantoi. So almost all of the political forces against the federalization experiment and against the Communist Party united around this opposition. Do you think that this feeling of opposition will continue until the elections and perhaps influence these?

Roșca: I think that the decision on the twenty-fourth of November to found the Committee to Defend the Independence and Constitution was very important. It is not enough to issue a statement on the founding of the committee, but to communicate with society. It is important to point out that the entities that signed the declaration were the main parties, plus many of the main NGOs. After the Kozak Memorandum was not signed, this committee ceased to exist. This is normal inasmuch as the committee was not contemplated as a united political party. It was a crisis situation, some responsible political figures united and did their thing. But the fact that the Christian Democrats and the centrists managed to put something like that together in such a short time was very important. We are now going to the elections as different parties, since unfortunately the centrists do not share our positions, which is their right, but nonetheless I wish them success in these elec-

tions, and I really hope that after the elections they keep their word to not enter into a post-electoral coalition with the Communists, and that we can build a coalition government with them.

Demokratizatsiya: There are many people that are surprised that Romania does not participate, does not pay enough attention on the problems in Moldova, even on the federalization problem, on Transnistria, and so on. Why do you think that Romanian politicians and diplomats are not paying enough attention?

Roșca: Many ritual declarations are made by politicians and diplomats in Bucharest, by the president, prime minister, minister of foreign affairs, on the issues of Transnistria, federalization, etc. But Romania nowadays is fully involved in the process of European integration; before the main goal of the political class was to enter NATO, now it's the European Union, and this complicates their situation. They somewhat are scared away by Moldova's problems. And once they fully turn towards the West, they somewhat turn their backs on Moldova. And because of our tragic history with Russia, Romania also suffered, and that is why many of its politicians are not too enthusiastic to oppose the Russian Federation. I have not heard strong statements lamenting the incorrect behavior of Russia towards Moldova. They do issue abstract declarations, criticizing separatism, suggesting dialogue, etc. These statements are indeed rather shy. At the very least, Moldova, for many politicians in Bucharest, represents just another problem. Maybe something will change.

Demokratizatsiya: I remember in Maastricht after all the countries criticized Russia because of the Kozak Memorandum, the Romanian foreign minister Mircea Geoana declared then that Romania had more of a right to enter the so-called pentagonal format of negotiations on the settlement of the separatism problem than Ukraine. But it was just a declaration; they did not follow up on it as far as I know.

Roșca: Romania did not entirely neglect its responsibility towards the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. But it cannot do that much since so far there is no official wish by the government in Moldova to invite Romania to participate. They cannot invite themselves. And no international organizations can force Moldova to invite Romania. It is evident that the relations between the Communist administration in Chișinău and Romania is a mini replica of the relations that existed between the USSR and the United States during the Cold War. There is a one-sided Cold War between Chișinău and Bucharest. The Communists here portray Romania as the internal enemy, as the aggressor, as a country that potentially would like to annex and destroy Moldova. Those elements of Soviet propaganda are being played out in mini-format here in Moldova.

Demokratizatsiya: That means that in order to change this situation, the government in Moldova must change.

Roșca: Absolutely. In order to improve the situation here, the government must change.

Demokratizatsiya: What steps is the Communist Party taking to decrease the possibilities of a victory of the opposition in Moldova? I am referring to anti-constitutional steps, such as the ones you often speak about—the lack of independence of the judiciary and electoral commission, plus the problems at Tele-radio Moldova. What other steps are they taking to either falsify the elections or organize an unfair election?

Roșca: We cannot say that simply on the day of the election they will steal a certain amount of the ballots. But what is certain is that society is not being given a chance to hear the other parties, their proposals and such. Voronin has surrounded himself with strong-hand types, and he is building a very strong secret service, a very strong repressive apparatus at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Procuracy, who are practically terrorizing important political figures and directors of mass media. So, of course, under these conditions it is very hard to compete with them. After the destruction of local-government autonomy, they built what Putin, and now Voronin, like to call “vertical power.” Today, the president controls all power, right up to the last village. And under these conditions, when the opposition is considered by the government as the internal enemy that needs to be destroyed, it is very hard to organize an electoral campaign correctly. That is why I have said a few times that if we do not succeed in democratizing our society with the help of pressure from the democratic opposition and Western powers, then we will likely have to organize a peaceful revolution either before or after the elections. We have no other chance.

Demokratizatsiya: The PPCD seems to have a hard vote of around 12 percent of the electorate. But how do you plan to increase that percentage? As really the only liberal-right party, how do you plan to increase your support beyond that 12 percent?

Roșca: Of course, that is a hard job, to strengthen the structure of our party in all the cities and villages, in the streets. But of course, people expect economic change, and so our message has to be one of economic freedom and how this translates into incomes. I think that the first important reform should involve the tax system, and end that shameful practice where all the contributors need an accountant. Because the way it is structured currently, no businessman can operate normally unless they are those big businessmen. We need to change the tax system and also reduce taxes. We need also to improve the investment climate, which is not only dependent on legislation. The climate must be improved not only to attract big Western investors, but mainly for people here to feel safe to invest their money here. Because what they are doing now is either taking their money out of the country, or working with only half their potential while they wait for the Communists to leave. For that, we need to reorganize the whole bureaucratic apparatus, and mainly to fight corruption. For that, we need to introduce the element of punishment for corruption, and

also investigate and prosecute corruption cases to show that the struggle against corruption is serious. This is very important for the investment climate, because since independence, no big officials or mafia figures have been arrested, or they were arrested, then let go. So people do not believe in their government. And because we are an agricultural country, and we have some very big problems with land reform, we must also address this problem. The situation can be stabilized. We need to introduce more competition, since it is clear by now that the laws that limit competition largely benefit a few people, usually the rulers of the country. When we introduce more competition, there will be economic growth. Another problem is our emigrants, and we have to think how to motivate them to come back. And that is not hard to do. If people there know that a government will come to power here that will give them the chance to make a living at home, I think that the majority that have left will come back, even if they make less money, but at least that income will be stable, and that they can put that money to work. They would like to be home, with their families, and protected. Many of them are illegal and take big risks. They would rather be here, but knowing that they can invest their small capital they have made abroad, and not just in an apartment or car, but also in a small business. I think that this is very important.

Demokratizatsiya: To repair the country after the liberation, do you have a favorite model among the post-Communist reformers?

Roşca: Of course we will look at what the Czechs and Slovaks have done, also the Bulgarians, the Baltics and here especially the Estonians, and to Georgia. This latest one because of their attempts to establish a rule-based state and their attempts to clean out the mafia structures, we can learn something from [President] Saakashvili. I do not think that it will be inordinately hard to reform Moldova, since all those other leaders that have gone through transitions are ready to help us. We will invite those experts. It is good that Moldova is small; it will be easier than reforming Ukraine or Russia, for example. It is also closer to Europe. It will be easier to develop the infrastructure and the communications, to improve the investment climate and to restructure the energy system, so as not to be too dependent on only one side. It will be somewhat easier than reforming other countries.