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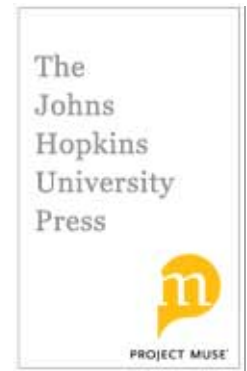
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PLURALISM BY DEFAULT IN MOLDOVA

Lucan A. Way

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In the 1990s, Moldova, a small country sandwiched between Romania and Ukraine and bereft of a strong civil society, an established rule of law, and any previous democratic experience, nevertheless boasted remarkably competitive and democratic politics. In order to understand the persistence and intensity of pluralism in Moldova, as well as in other post-Soviet countries such as Russia and Ukraine through the mid-1990s, we need to move beyond the usual focus on democratic institution-building. Moldova should be seen less as a struggling democracy, where leaders strive to build more pluralistic institutions, and much more as a case of failed authoritarianism or what I call *pluralism by default*, a form of political competition specific to weak states.

Pluralism by default describes countries in which institutionalized political competition survives not because leaders are especially democratic or because societal actors are particularly strong, but because the government is too fragmented and the state too weak to impose authoritarian rule in a democratic international context. In such cases, leaders lack the authority and coordination to prevent today's allies from becoming tomorrow's challengers, control the legislature, impose censorship, manipulate elections successfully, or use force against political opponents. Such countries are caught in a paradox: The same state weakness and governmental fragmentation that promotes pluralism also undermines effective governance and may ultimately threaten long-term democratic consolidation.

Moldova lacks most of the qualities that social scientists consider critical for democratic development. First, the country is extremely poor,

with a per capita gross national income that in 1999 was 65 percent of that found in Albania, 32 percent of that found in Belarus, and 7 percent of that found in the United States.¹ Moldova is also highly rural with an urban population of just 46 percent—in the former Soviet Union, only the Central Asia republics have lower shares of urban residents. Moldova has also suffered one of the worst economic downturns in the post-Soviet region. In the decade following 1989, GDP plummeted by almost 70 percent. (During this time, only war-torn Georgia endured worse.) Further, Moldova also has no tradition of democracy or even independent statehood that reaches back before the 1990s: Most of the country's current territory formed the eastern Romanian province of Bessarabia until Stalin, given a free hand by Hitler in the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, demanded and got the province's cession by Bucharest in 1940.

A Bifurcated Country

Prospects for pluralism in Moldova would also seem to be threatened by divisions over national identity. As a result of Stalin's annexation of eastern Romania, the newly formed Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic became perilously divided between a Romanian-speaking western zone and the highly industrialized, Slavic-speaking Transdnestr region in the east. This split created the basis for significant tensions that surfaced during the era of Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika*. In the late 1980s, the Popular Front of Moldova, founded by Moldovan academics and writers, focused on strengthening the linguistic and ethnic rights of Romanian-speakers whom nationalists felt had suffered disproportionately under communism.

In 1990, the Popular Front won roughly a third of the seats in the Supreme Soviet and chose the premier. Bolstered by its early victories, the Front began to press for immediate unification with Romania, restrictions on Russian in-migration, and increased employment opportunities for Romanian-speaking citizens. Such policies helped to generate a highly polarized atmosphere.² Opposition quickly appeared among local Russians and Ukrainians (who together accounted for about a quarter of the population in the late 1980s) in the Transdnestr, and also sprang up among the Gagauz (a group of Turkic-speaking Slavs in the south who account for about 4 percent of Moldova's people).

In the summer of 1990, deputies from the Transdnestr and Gagauzia started boycotting the national legislature and declared their respective regions autonomous. Gun battles soon broke out between Moldovan government troops and separatist armed forces in and around Transdnestr. Mircea Snegur, Moldova's first president, declared a nationwide state of emergency in the spring of 1992 in an attempt to disarm separatist militias. The late General Alexander Lebed's Russian

Fourteenth Army, stationed in the area, responded by supporting Transdnestrian separatist forces and a full-scale civil war broke out. Having cost about three hundred lives and a thousand wounded, fighting receded by the end of the summer. Since then, Transdnestria has remained a de facto separate state outside of Moldovan control.

In addition, Moldova suffers from many of the same deficiencies found in other post-Soviet countries. Like many of its neighbors, Moldova has a weak civil society. There are many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); but they tend to be small and to rely heavily on foreign funding.³ Without institutionalized interest groups and parties to sustain it, popular political action has generally been spontaneous and short-lived, if sometimes explosive. While one can find instances in which protests have been partially successful, nongovernmental organizations lack the institutional strength necessary to keep state actors accountable on a regular basis. Equally as important, Moldova lacks an independent business class. The elimination of central planning has done nothing to eradicate the state's capacity to manipulate groups, firms, and individuals through various forms of harassment, extortion, or bribery.

Finally, Moldovan democracy has suffered from a weak legal tradition common to post-Soviet countries. In the absence of a strong rule of law, power holders have been able to penetrate and to use supposedly nonpartisan government agencies—such as the tax administration and security agencies—to strike at critics and to manipulate elections. In many post-Soviet republics, oppositionists and businesspeople who run afoul of the chief executive have often found themselves targeted by the tax collector. As in Ukraine, the discretionary enforcement of tax laws gives incumbents ample leeway to threaten subordinates or outsiders.⁴ Opposition deputies in Moldova complain that such intimidation makes it hard to convince businesspeople to support antigovernment candidates and parties.

Security agencies have also been an important political resource for incumbents in Moldova. Soviet rule bestowed on Moldova and other republics a vast physical and human infrastructure for surveillance and political manipulation. Even after the USSR's collapse, an extensive array of listening devices and agents remained. According to former Moldovan security officials, leaders sought to reinvigorate the leftover secret-police apparatus in order to harass foes and to collect compromising material (*kompromat*) on rivals. Most observers concur that Petru Lucinschi, Moldova's second president, was particularly aggressive in his use of security agencies for political purposes. Upon coming to power in early 1997, he immediately created a department for Organized Crime and Corruption Prevention, complete with search-and-seizure powers and the authority to carry out preliminary investigations into high-level corruption. In the late 1990s, the head of this Department, Nicolae Alexei,

became notorious for publicizing speculative accusations against Lucinschi's opponents and for periodically harassing his enemies.

Surprising Pluralism

In the face of such poverty, economic decline, ethnic conflict, and weak civil society and rule of law, Moldova had the most robustly democratic polity in the former Soviet Union outside of the Baltic republics and has come very close to meeting standard minimum definitions of democracy.⁵ First, elections have generally been bitterly fought. Despite coming to power in uncontested election in 1991, President Mircea Snegur lost the presidency to the head of the legislature, Petru Lucinschi, in 1996. Moreover, legislative elections in 1990, 1994, 1998, and 2001 all caused serious changes in the party and in the ideological composition of the legislature. Second, the media in post-Soviet Moldova have carried a diverse range of views, even if many media outlets remain state-run or party-owned. Third, between 1994 and 2000, Moldova's Constitutional Court played a key role in mediating conflicts between the different branches of government.

Finally, the legislature has consistently constrained presidential authority to a degree not seen in Moldova's post-Soviet neighbors. In 1994, the legislature virtually excluded President Snegur from designing the country's constitution. President Lucinschi faced similar problems. When he threatened to force early legislative elections if his reform measures were not passed in 1997, the legislature responded by immediately deposing the president's strongest supporter from the legislative leadership. In 2000, the legislature countered efforts by Lucinschi to create a stronger presidency by voting to eliminate the post of popularly elected president altogether. Currently, Moldova has one of the few parliamentary regimes in the former Soviet Union.

Yet in contrast to what many have assumed when writing about the "perils of presidentialism,"⁶ the establishment of a parliamentary system has not promoted democratic development in Moldova. If anything, the opposite has been the case. In February 2001, the completely unreconstructed Communist Party of Moldova came to power by winning 71 of 101 seats in the unicameral parliament—the first-ever comeback of a hard-line communist party in the post-Soviet world. Although the Communists won just over 50 percent of the vote, they benefited from an extraordinarily high 6 percent minimum required for any party to enter the legislature. As a result, several center-right parties, which ironically had supported the raising of the threshold to 6 percent just the year before, failed to qualify for seats.

With the Communists in power, political competition has been reduced in several areas. In January 2002, Communist authorities temporarily banned a political party after it protested laws mandating

the increased study of the Russian language in general-education schools. But the most noticeable problems have been with the press. In late November 2001, the Economic Court ordered the closure of the stridently antigovernment weekly *Kommersant Moldovy*—the first such closure in the history of post-Soviet Moldova. State television and radio, the main source of news for much of the country, have been widely criticized for severely limiting access to members of the opposition. In the spring of 2002, journalists unsuccessfully went on strike as a protest against what they saw as undue pressure to stick to the party line. In mid-March, the anchorman of the Russian-language newscast was fired after he aired information on the protest. A recent change in the media law, made in response to demands by the Parliamentary Assembly of Europe, has been widely criticized for leaving in place the most important mechanisms through which the government can control the media. The Communists also seem determined to subordinate the traditionally independent Constitutional Court and to reduce judicial independence. As of mid-February, they had replaced 70 percent of the heads of district and appellate courts and managed to increase unilateral legislative authority over selection of Constitutional Court judges. The Communists also instituted other laws that observers argue will ultimately diminish judicial autonomy.⁷

The most important threat to Communist power came early in 2002, when pro-Romanian nationalists brought thousands of students into the streets to protest the increased mandatory study of Russian in primary and secondary schools, and to call for the end of Communist rule. The demonstrations forced the government to compromise on the language issue, but petered out without damaging the Communists' grip on power.

Overall, the level of pluralism in Moldova has been greater than in places such as pre-1995 Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. In such competitive authoritarian regimes,⁸ elections, the press, and the legislature have created considerable political uncertainty and competition. In these countries, however, executives have dominated the political process and undermined democratic institutions to a degree unseen in Moldova. As in Moldova, the level of pluralism in these other post-Soviet countries has gradually declined since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the late 1990s, Ukraine's President Leonid Kuchma used a combination of repression and blackmail to suppress press freedom and reduce electoral competition to a degree not seen in earlier years.

Similarly, M. Steven Fish has argued that Russia has witnessed a steady democratic decline throughout the 1990s, setting the stage for Vladimir Putin's rule today.⁹ In Belarus, competitive authoritarian elections in 1994 brought to power the outsider Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who then imposed one of the area's most severely authoritarian regimes. In Armenia, President Robert Kocharian has been able to suppress free expression to a much greater extent than was his predecessor Levon Ter-Petrosian.

Roughly similar developments took place in Azerbaijan and Georgia. Central Asia witnessed no democratic transfers of power in the 1990s, but most observers agree that the regimes in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan became less pluralistic as the decade wore on.¹⁰

Sources of Political Competition

The pluralism by default that emerged in weak post-Soviet states in the 1990s—whether in relatively democratic Moldova or more authoritarian Russia and Ukraine—represents a distinct mode of political competition. This type of pluralism is a by-product of weak elite organization and general state incapacity rather than a dynamic civil society or powerful opposition.

While the literature on democratic transitions has focused overwhelmingly on the capacity of various institutions considered essential for democracy—such as civil society, party systems, and the judiciary—most have forgotten that establishing nondemocratic rule also requires an important level of elite organization and state capacity—particularly in the context of international liberal hegemony. In a world dominated by democratic powers, would-be authoritarian rulers must often be able to limit political competition while maintaining at least the appearance of democracy. Creating an authoritarian state in such an environment requires a high degree of elite cohesion and top-down control. Leaders must accomplish a range of tasks at once, simultaneously finding relatively subtle ways to 1) prevent high-level defections; 2) deal with often-intransigent legislatures; 3) limit critics; 4) manipulate elections; and 5) control military and security forces. The frequent failure of Moldovan and other post-Soviet leaders to overcome these challenges has significantly promoted pluralism in the area.

1) Preventing Elite Defection. First, as in most authoritarian regimes, the central threat to incumbents in cases of pluralism by default has generally come from within rather than from without. Former allies and immediate subordinates are particularly dangerous challengers because they have access to state organizational, financial, media, and other resources that society as a whole does not.

In many post-Soviet republics, premiers, heads of legislatures, and cabinet members—rather than regional heads or leaders of civil society—have been the most serious challengers to sitting presidents. In Moldova, President Snegur was confronted in the first round of the 1996 election by both his own prime minister, Andrei Sangheli, and the legislative chairman, Petru Lucinschi. In Ukraine in 1994, Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma successfully took on Leonid Kravchuk, the president who had appointed him. Subsequently, Kuchma's most serious opposition came from prime ministers Yevhenii Marchuk, Viktor Yushchenko,

and Pavlo Lazarenko. In Russia, the most serious potential challenges to Yeltsin's rule came from Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoi and a succession of (in Yeltsin's eyes) dangerously popular prime ministers. In Armenia, President Levon Ter-Petrosian faced a serious crisis when former prime minister Vazgen Manukian almost defeated him in the September 1996 election.

Mindful of the threat posed by prime ministers, many post-Soviet presidents have worked hard to undermine those who become too successful or too popular. In late 1999, Lucinschi conspired to bring down Prime Minister Ion Sturza in part because he was relatively successful and growing in public esteem. In 1996, Kuchma dismissed Marchuk from the premiership for "concentrat[ing] his time on building an independent political image." Five years later, Kuchma did the same to Viktor Yushchenko, who was leading Ukraine through its first-ever period of post-Soviet economic growth and becoming the country's single most popular political figure in the process. In a similar vein, Boris Yeltsin fired Premier Yevgenii Primakov when the latter's popularity started to climb in 1999.

2) *Controlling the Legislature.* Elected legislatures have often presented important obstacles to the monopolization of political authority in the former Soviet Union. In 1994, for instance, the Moldovan Parliament stymied President Snegur's efforts to strengthen his office, and did the same thing five years later when Lucinschi tried to impose a form of presidential rule that the Venice Commission deemed "contrary to European democratic principles."¹¹ Other post-Soviet legislatures, while not nearly as powerful as Moldova's, have also presented important challenges to presidential rule. Ukraine's Supreme Council refused in 2001 to pass a bill that would have strengthened President Kuchma's power. And in Russia in 1993, Yeltsin felt compelled to mobilize the military against the legislature when it threatened his power.

3) *Limiting Free Expression.* In Moldova, governmental incapacity has also undermined efforts to limit free speech. In the 1990s, many laws on the books limited free speech, but leaders were rarely able to implement them in practice. In 1992, for example, the legislature passed a law to mandate a steep fine and up to two years' hard labor for slandering the president or the legislative chairman.¹² In some cases, laws went unimplemented due to the lack of enabling legislation. In many other cases, however, the government was simply too weak and fragmented to impose censorship. For instance, Snegur was unable to prevent criticism of himself even in the state-run media whose directors he had appointed. The head of state television, a Snegur appointee, came out explicitly in favor of the president's opponent Lucinschi during the 1996 presidential elections.

Moldova's weakness in the face of more powerful and wealthy foreign neighbors has also undermined government efforts to limit criticism in the media. Many citizens enjoy relatively easy access to Russian and Romanian television that the government has difficulty controlling. Efforts to control externally financed press organs have often failed. Thus, despite attempts to suppress distribution of the anti-Moldovan Russian press during the civil war in the breakaway region of Transnistria,¹³ Russian news publications remained widely available. More recently, the effort to shut down Transnistrian-funded *Kommersant Moldovy* for violating a law banning threats to Moldovan territorial integrity fizzled when the journal reopened within a couple of weeks under a slightly new name (*Kommersant Plus*)

Elite fragmentation and weak vertical control at least partially account for the remarkable fact that Soviet-era elites in Moldova and Ukraine left power in relatively free elections in the mid-1990s.

and a new registration. One source of press freedom in Moldova appears to have been the government's inability to enforce its own laws. "Laws against free expression," one independent journalist noted, "have rarely been implemented because laws in general are often not fulfilled."¹⁴

4) Rigging the Electoral Process. Central control and elite cohesion are also required to eliminate uncertainty during elections. In the current international environment, manipulating elections involves being able to use the cover of laws and regulations to fragment, intimidate, and marginalize the opposition before it grows strong enough to mount a challenge on election day. The aspiring autocrat must ensure compliance and prevent opposition activity across a wide territory and among hundreds (or thousands) of local officials whose loyalty in most weak states is often uncertain. Elite fragmentation and weak vertical control at least partially account for the remarkable fact that Soviet-era elites in Moldova and Ukraine left power in relatively free elections in the mid-1990s. In both countries, the incumbents lacked strong popular support but, in principle at least, enjoyed overwhelming access to administrative resources and were confronted by a relatively weak civil society. However, they found it incredibly hard to manipulate the voting process without top-down control of key state agencies and in the face of severe elite fragmentation.

In the 1996 Moldovan presidential election, elite fragmentation appears to have hindered central control over the country's ten regional governments as well as the press, thereby baffling President Snegur's efforts to fend off the twin challenges mounted by his own premier as

well as the chairman of parliament. In many ways, Snegur was in the weakest position of the three candidates. Prime Minister Sangheli headed the governing party and wielded the most direct administrative power over regional leaders; he was widely reported to be actively working with farm directors (key officials in predominantly rural Moldova) to rig the voting. But even Sangheli's degree of control was highly uncertain. One of his campaign officials recalled that local officials almost always vowed "100 percent support," but added that "it was very difficult to follow up on such promises."¹⁵ In the end, Sangheli lost. Weak central control and elite fragmentation in this context undermined efforts to rig the election and allowed public opinion to play the decisive role.

Similarly, Kravchuk's loss to Kuchma in Ukraine's 1994 presidential race was due at least in part to Kravchuk's weak grip on his own administration in key locales. In several populous eastern provinces, Election Commission workers openly manipulated the voting process in favor of Kuchma, and in a number of cases Kravchuk supporters were not allowed to observe the voting. At the same time, Kravchuk was strong in the less populated west and appears to have manufactured some votes there.¹⁶

Contrary to what most observers assumed at the time, this last instance of electoral turnover was not a sign of democratic consolidation, but only the uncertain steps of an incumbent unable to bring his overwhelming resource advantages to bear in the face of a divided government and pervasive institutional disorganization. Subsequently, Kuchma learned from his predecessors' mistakes and crafted state structures better suited for rigging the electoral process.

5) Control over the Military and Security Services. Finally, weak and divided executive control over military and security forces has hindered the emergence of autocratic rule in the former Soviet Union. Leaders have sometimes shied away from using force in political disputes because they have feared that their own control over the military might prove shaky. In Ukraine, President Kravchuk considered breaking up the legislature when it insisted on early presidential elections in 1994. However, according to recent reports, he was dissuaded when the heads of the SBU (Ukrainian KGB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs rejected the idea.¹⁷ In Moldova, President Snegur attempted to fire his top general in what some insiders interpreted as an effort by the president to take control of the military "just in case [Snegur] needed [it] in political battle."¹⁸ The general refused to step down, however, and was able to keep his job when the legislature backed him. When a fierce dispute broke out between Snegur and the legislature in the mid-1990s, the military played no role, in part because neither the chief executive nor the legislature could securely command it. Finally, in Russia in 1993,

Yeltsin was able to use troops against a dissident legislative faction only after much uncertainty and considerable effort on his part to get military leaders to act.

In all but a few post-Soviet states, the political pluralism of the early 1990s was fueled less by awakening societal demands than by state collapse and the elite disorientation created by the fall of the Soviet Union amid a climate of international liberal hegemony. Especially in these early years, a disorganization and fragmentation among elites combined with uncertain executive control over regional governments and security organs to produce pluralism by default. Since then, many post-Soviet rulers have adapted to the new circumstances, strengthened their states, and reduced or eliminated competitive politics—as we have begun to see in Moldova and have already witnessed to varying degrees in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and the Caucasus.

Parties and Authoritarianism

The difficulty that successive presidents had in concentrating and asserting power in the 1990s resulted in part from the weakness of ruling political organizations or parties. In Ukraine and Moldova especially, the absence or sheer weakness of pro-presidential parties made it much more difficult for executives to gather sufficient elite support to concentrate power in their hands. In the 1990s, many presidents including Yeltsin, Lucinschi, Kravchuk, and Kuchma disregarded or actively discouraged the creation of strong pro-governmental organizations. Instead, they often used divide-and-rule tactics in order to prevent the emergence of any party or faction that might ultimately challenge their personal authority. President Lucinschi in Moldova, for example, threw his support behind multiple and competing blocks in legislative elections. While this tactic may have hindered the emergence of a strong alternative power center, it also alienated many political leaders who considered Lucinschi an untrustworthy and unreliable political ally. Thus, the head of the legislature, Dumitru Diacov, who from 1996 to 1998 had been a strong supporter of Lucinschi, deserted the president in large part because of Lucinschi's failure to consistently support Diacov's pro-presidential "Bloc for a Democratic and Prosperous Moldova" in 1998. Diacov was able to use widespread elite distrust of the president to thwart him in his efforts to gain more power.¹⁹

More recently, pluralism has been increasingly threatened by the emergence of a highly cohesive ruling Communist Party of Moldova. In contrast to other Moldovan parties, which are loose coalitions of relatively autonomous high-level politicians, the Communists are a tightly organized and relatively disciplined group of individuals strongly tied to the party. Deputies include many unknown academics and even drivers, who are unlikely to break rank. Such cohesiveness has facilitated a

level of government control over state-run media not seen under Snegur or Lucinschi. Similarly, the recent efforts of Russia's Putin and (to a much lesser extent) Ukraine's Kuchma to create their own parties are parts of larger strategies to monopolize political control.²⁰ In such cases, the combination of party organization and government resources can be extremely destructive of democratic development. Party-building is good for democracy when *opposition* parties or party *systems* are built, but bad when the ruling group becomes institutionalized in the form of a dominant party that rules against the background of a weak and disorganized civil society.

But why has pluralism lasted for so long in a relatively unpromising place such as Moldova when it has died fairly rapidly in a country such as Ukraine? Because they defied standard structuralist predictions of democratic development, "democratic overachievers" such as Moldova led many analysts in the 1990s to ignore larger historical factors and intractable institutional legacies in favor of a focus on the role of leadership, institutional design, and contingency. But the relative resilience displayed by Moldovan pluralism is less a product of contingency and much more a function of long-term structural factors—just not those typically associated with democracy.

In post-Soviet states without the rule of law, a democratic history, or a dynamic civil society, the degree to which pluralism endures has depended on how severely split elites are, and how long they stay that way. One of the most important sources of sustained elite fragmentation and state weakness in Moldova has been ethnonational conflict rooted in the nature of Moldova's incorporation into the USSR. In Moldova, tensions over national identity, far stronger than anything seen in Ukraine, have been severe enough to undercut efforts by any single group to monopolize political power in the country. Yet such polarization, as Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan rightly note, creates serious problems for governance and long-term democratic consolidation.²¹ The basis for pluralism, in other words, has also been the basis for civil war.

Comparing Moldova to its neighbor Ukraine underscores the ways in which ethnonational polarization can thwart efforts to concentrate political power. Both President Snegur in Moldova and President Kravchuk in Ukraine faced the problem of governing a country split between a pro-Russian east and a nationalist west. Each man had nationalist ties and paid a price for them, losing his office to a more pro-Russian candidate.

But Moldova was clearly the more fragmented of the two polities—a fact that helps to explain why presidents have been much weaker there. While Ukraine has been split in two between a pro-Russian east and a pro-independence west, Moldova has been split into three as nationalists who support unification with Romania vie with leftists who strive for closer ties to Russia and a center that seeks to preserve Moldovan

independence. Because of this difference, Ukrainian presidents have had a much easier time winning support from nationalists, who until very recently saw increased presidential authority as crucial to defending Ukrainian independence in the face of a communist-dominated legislature. Ukrainian nationalists, who wanted desperately to maintain national unity, were willing to moderate their ethnic demands and ally themselves with presidents from the old *nomenklatura* in what was referred to in the early 1990s as the “pacts with the devil.”

Moldovan presidents, by contrast, have had extremely weak nationalist backing and as a result have found themselves far more isolated in their power struggles with the legislature. Pro-Romanian nationalists have had little reason to compromise for the sake of national unity because they have wanted to join Romania in any case. Such attitudes contributed to increased ethnic tension in the late 1980s and early 1990s but also undermined efforts to concentrate presidential authority. In 1994, during the debate over the new constitution, the nationalists focused exclusively on divisive ethnic issues and failed to support Snegur in his efforts to strengthen the presidency. Five years later, President Lucinschi was similarly alone in his efforts to concentrate power. The lack of nationalist loyalty enjoyed by Kuchma contributed to Lucinschi’s extreme isolation by the end of the 1990s when Moldovan nationalists helped to spearhead efforts to create a parliamentary system (and thereby destroy Lucinschi politically) in 2000–2001.

More recently, polarization over national issues has at least partly impeded the efforts of Moldova’s Communist-dominated legislature to dictate policy. While efforts to block Communist censorship and monopoly control over most political institutions have been relatively unsuccessful, nationalists have been able to block efforts at Russification. In the spring of 2002, the radical nationalist leader Iurie Rosca mobilized thousands of protesters in the capital to block Communist moves to impose the use of the Russian language.

The Pitfalls of Pluralism by Default

The role that polarization over national issues has played in promoting pluralism highlights an important dilemma that pluralism by default creates. Where civil society and the rule of law are weak, the very factors that keep pluralism alive by preventing any leader from exercising authoritarian control can *simultaneously* prevent the consolidation of a stable and effective democratic government. As Linz and Stepan have aptly observed, conflicts over national borders profoundly undercut efforts at democratic consolidation.²² Yet such national conflicts may also thwart efforts to concentrate authoritarian political power. Anti-Russian demonstrations in Moldova have undercut Communist hegemony, but have also threatened to make ethnic tensions worse. The same forces

that preserve political competition also have the potential to promote civil war.

Polarization and pluralism by default undermine governance in other ways as well. Timothy Frye has argued that polarization hinders growth by preventing a coherent response to economic crisis and by making “it difficult for governments to make credible commitments to respect existing and future property rights.”²³ In addition, the frequent battles between president and prime ministers that have characterized pluralism by default clearly undercut governance. When presidents fear that their prime ministers will do *too well*, something has plainly gone wrong. Finally, pluralism by default often reflects uncertain lines of state authority. In Moldova, there was often a high degree of uncertainty about who had authority over key parts of the state such as the army and the regional governments. While this appears to have discouraged election manipulation and the use of the military in political battles, it has also created obvious problems for state building.

The governance dilemma to which pluralism by default gives rise is fundamentally different from the classic tradeoff between democracy and effective governance that Adam Przeworski and others have discussed.²⁴ Traditionally, democracy has been seen as a threat to governance because it allows interest groups to participate in politics and to block reforms. The account that I have presented here is different. According to my account, democratic participation does not in and of itself weaken governance; rather, pluralism and ineffective governance spring from the same root.

At the same time, it needs to be stressed that while pluralism by default and elite polarization may undermine governance, *cohesion and capacity by themselves are certainly not sufficient for good governance and may undermine governance for other reasons*. It may be that Russia is governed more effectively under an authoritarian Putin than under a more pluralistic but chaotic Yeltsin. It is just as likely, however, that elite cohesion will be used to create greater rent-seeking opportunities. Thus greater elite coherence in Heydar Aliyev’s Azerbaijan has ended civil war but also created the basis for extensive graft and corruption. In such contexts, there may be clear advantages to the chaos of pluralism by default—unless, of course, such chaos descends into civil war.

NOTES

1. Per capita gross national income at purchasing power parity in Moldova was US\$2,100 in 1999. In the former Soviet Union, only Tajikistan seems to have been poorer.

2. See William Crowther, “Nationalism and Political Transformation in Moldova,” in Donald Dyer, ed., *Studies in Moldovan: The History, Culture, Language and Contemporary Politics of the People of Moldova* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1996), 36.

3. See the chapters on Moldova and Ukraine in Adrian Karatnycky, Alexander Motyl, and Amanda Schnetzer, eds., *Nations in Transit 2001* (New York: Freedom House, 2002).

4. For a stimulating analysis of the use of state tax administration as a mechanism of political pressure, see Keith Darden, "Blackmail as a Tool of State Domination: Ukraine Under Kuchma," *East European Constitutional Review* 10 (Spring–Summer 2001): 67–71.

5. Democracies are defined as those countries in which: "1) Executives and legislatures are chosen through elections that are open, free, and fair; 2) virtually all adults possess the right to vote; 3) political rights and civil liberties, including freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom to criticize the government without reprisal, are broadly protected; and 4) elected authorities possess real authority to govern." Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 53.

6. Juan J. Linz, "The Perils of Presidentialism," *Journal of Democracy* 1 (Winter 1990): 51–70.

7. Author's interview with press officer, Moldovan Constitutional Court. See the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights Report for Moldova, 2002 (www.ihf-hr.org/reports/AR2002/country%20links/Moldova.htm).

8. In this type of regime, key democratic institutions such as elections, the press, and parliament determine political outcomes and create an important level of political competition, yet democracy is fundamentally undermined by the continued and regular governmental abuse of civil liberties and political rights. See Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism."

9. M. Steven Fish, "Authoritarianism Despite Elections: Russia in Light of Democratic Theory and Practice," paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001.

10. See Kathleen Collins, "Clans, Pacts, and Politics in Central Asia," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (July 2002): 137–52.

11. *RFE/RL Newline* Vol. 3, No. 243, 16 December 1999.

12. TASS 9 January 1992. This law was repealed in 1996.

13. ITAR-Tass 2 September 1992; *Krasnaya zvezda*, 9 September 1992.

14. Author's interview with Nicolai Negru, 9 February 2002.

15. Author's interview with former Sangheli staffer, 31 January 2002.

16. *The Presidential Elections in Ukraine* (Kiev: Report of the Democratic Elections in Ukraine Observation and Coordination Center, 1994), Part II: 12, 14, 16. Taras Kuzio, "Kravchuk to Kuchma: The Ukrainian Presidential Elections of 1994," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 12 (June 1996): 132–33.

17. Sergei Rakhmanin, Iulia Mostovaia, and Ol'ga Dmitricheva, "Smert' mertvoho sezonu" (Death of the dead season), *Dzerkalo tizhnia* (Kiev), 27 July–3 August, 2002.

18. Author's interviews with a former national security advisor to President Snegur, 5 February 2002; and a former defense ministry official, 31 January 2002.

19. Author's interview with Dumitru Diacov, 10 February 2002.

20. For a discussion of Putin's party, see Regina Smyth, "Building State Capacity

from the Inside Out: Parties of Power and the Success of the President's Reform Agenda in Russia," *Politics and Society*, forthcoming.

21. See the first chapter in Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

22. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, ch. 1.

23. Timothy Frye, "The Perils of Polarization: Economic Performance in the Post-Communist World," paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001.

24. See Adam Przeworski's discussion of the obstacles created by democracy in the fourth chapter of his *Democracy and the Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).