



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on February 21, 2023

Thousands of Protesters in Moldova Want Energy Subsidies, Resignation of Pro-EU President

Several thousand protesters gathered in Moldova's capital of Chisinau on February 19 to insist that the country's new pro-EU government completely cover citizens' winter heating bills in light of cost-of-living struggles and soaring inflation.

The protest was staged by a recently established group called Movement for the People and backed by members of Moldova's Russia-friendly Shor Party, which holds six seats in the former Soviet republic's 101-seat legislature.

Some of the demonstrators who gathered in Chisinau demanded the resignation of the country's president, chanting "Down with Maia Sandu!" Others held placards with the faces of some of Moldova's leaders and politicians next to photographs of large homes and fancy cars.

"They have millions. We are dying of hunger," they said.

Sandu on February 13 pointed out what she claimed was an alleged plot by Moscow to destabilize the government to put Moldova "at the disposal of Russia," and to undermine its efforts to join the European Union (EU).

"Through violent actions, masked under protests of the so-called opposition, the change of power in Chisinau would be forced," she said. "In carrying out the plan, the authors rely on several internal forces, but especially on criminal groups such as the Shor formation and all of its derivatives."

In turn, Russia decried Sandu's claims as "completely unfounded." "Such claims are completely unfounded and unsubstantiated," the Russian foreign ministry said.

Additionally, Ukrainian leader and globalist Volodymyr Zelensky said previously that Kyiv had "intercepted the plan for the destruction of Moldova by Russian intelligence."

The Russian foreign ministry slammed Kyiv for trying to drive a wedge between Moldova and Russia and denounced Moldovan authorities for Russophobia.

"Unlike Western countries and Ukraine, we do not interfere in the internal affairs of Moldova and other countries of the world," the ministry said.

"Russia does not pose a threat to the security of the Republic of Moldova," it elaborated, saying that "stable and friendly relations" with Russia could benefit Moldova.

A slew of outspoken protests encouraged by the Shor Party erupted in Moldova amid a grave energy



AP Images
Protest in Chisinau, Moldova



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crisis that beleaguered the country after Ukraine stopped exporting electricity on the pretext of Russian airstrikes on major infrastructure. Russia's Gazprom also reduced gas deliveries by half in 2022 as well, Chisinau posited.

In response to domestic protests, Moldovan Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita announced her resignation, along with her entire cabinet, on February 10.

"If our government had had the support at home as we had from our European partners, we could have advanced further and faster," Gavrilita said at a press conference. "Moldova is entering a new phase, one in which security is our priority."

Gavrilita, who is from the same pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) as Sandu, only cited a lack of "support and trust at home" for her resignation. After negotiations of the Gavrilita cabinet, Moldova was granted EU candidate status last June.

Russia, which has military bases in the breakaway Moldovan region of Transnistria, a narrow strip of land along the border with Ukraine, has long been blamed by Gavrilita of inciting dissent in the country, including organizing protests in Chisinau, as well as using economic means to pressure EU-aspiring Moldovan leadership.

However, to some observers, Gavrilita's resignation was unexpected. After all, Gavrilita recently met with European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels to discuss Moldova's EU membership prospects. "Moldova can keep counting on the EU," Von der Leyen posted after the meeting on February 6, but — hinging on who will form the new Moldovan government — a seamless accession process is uncertain.

Meanwhile, Dorin Recean, Sandu's pro-European security adviser, replaced Gavrilita as the country's new prime minister.

Also, Moldova's government urged the country's Constitutional Court to outlaw the Shor Party. The country's anti-corruption prosecutors' office claimed that the public protests were partially instigated by Russian money.

Besides, the office said that more than 20 searches were conducted at the homes of party members who were "actively and systematically involved in receiving and distributing money ... for the transport and remuneration" of citizens to the protests.

Eight people were arrested, they claimed. The Shor Party lambasted authorities for deploying thousands of police officers to obstruct protests and "stop people from entering" the capital.

The party's leader, Ilan Shor, is a Moldovan oligarch presently in exile in Israel. He was recently singled out on a U.S. State Department sanctions list as working for Russian interests.

The United States claimed Shor worked with "corrupt oligarchs and Moscow-based entities to create political unrest in Moldova" and to fend off the country's efforts to join the EU.

On the other hand, The Movement for the People's website stated that the group was set up in early February and comprises "several political forces, public associations, local elected officials and civic activists" to tackle the "unprecedented crises" Moldova and its citizens face.

Due to its close proximity to the Ukraine crisis, the latter magnified all existing political tensions in Moldova since last year.

As their country is located between Ukraine and NATO-member Romania, security has become a major



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issue for Moldovans since hostilities between Russia and Ukraine broke out last February. Moldova's [unilateral military neutrality](#) implies that Russia must not be provoked by the country's attempts to step up defense capabilities and solicit military assistance abroad, according to some officials. Yet others such as Sandu have contemplated joining a defense alliance once the majority of the population is in favor of it.

"Now there is a serious discussion ... about our capacity to defend ourselves, whether we can do it ourselves, or whether we should be part of a larger alliance," Sandu said in an interview with [Politico](#). "And if we come, at some point, to the conclusion as a nation that we need to change neutrality, this should happen through a democratic process."

Joining NATO typically takes years. To complicate matters, Moldova's existing conflict over Transnistria theoretically prevents it from NATO membership for the near future. Reunification with Romania, which is already part of the western security establishment, is another route that Moldova could consider. Automatic NATO membership is exactly why discussions in Chisinau have increased in recent months, stoking concerns in Moscow.

Although Bucharest has been typically skeptical of the idea of reunification, Moldovan sources assert that Romanian President Klaus Iohannis not only changed Romania's mind but is proactively campaigning for Brussels' approval.



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