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## Communists Lose in Moldova Vote

**By MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ**

CHISINAU, [Moldova](#) — Moldova's pro-Western opposition parties appear to have unseated Europe's last governing Communist Party in repeat parliamentary elections that have become a test of whether this impoverished former Soviet republic will lean toward the West or Russia.

With most votes counted from Wednesday's elections, the Communists seem to have lost the majority they held for eight years in Parliament, winning about 45 percent of the vote, the Central Elections Commission said.

A smattering of opposition parties, loosely united in their pledge to forge stronger ties with the [European Union](#), have vowed to form a coalition, which would give them a majority of 53 seats in the 101-seat Parliament. But any coalition would be fragile, analysts said, and potentially hindered by a sizable Communist minority that is still likely to be led by Moldova's departing president, Vladimir Voronin.

"It is difficult to predict how the future will play out," said Oazu Nantoi, the deputy chairman of the Democratic Party. "But the first step has been taken: Voronin's monopoly on power has been broken."

Residents of Moldova's capital, Chisinau, reacted warily Thursday to word of a possible change in government, given the many unfulfilled promises in nearly two decades of independence.

"We are very confused here in Moldova," said Anastasiya Sinarchuk, a 74-year-old pensioner. "As soon as anyone becomes president, they all of a sudden have villas abroad and comforts for their children."

The streets of Chisinau were largely quiet on Thursday, in stark contrast to April, when a victory by the Communist Party in a first round of parliamentary elections [set off riots](#) by young people weary of the moribund political and economic policies they say the Communists imposed.

Moldova, with four million people, is Europe's poorest country. Unemployment is high, and the country is heavily dependent on remittances from Moldovans working abroad. It lies between Ukraine and Romania, a European Union member with which it shares a common language and culture. Romania also provides a steady tug to the West, particularly for Moldova's youth.

Mr. Voronin had sought the support of an older generation with nostalgia for Moldova's Soviet-era stability. Of late, he has hewed closest to Russia, which maintains troops in the breakaway Transdniester region and supplies most of Moldova's energy. Moscow also recently promised Moldova a \$500 million loan.

His critics say Mr. Voronin has adopted much of the Kremlin's governing style, cracking down on political dissent and muting critical media. His family, particularly his son Oleg, has monopolized many of the

country's profitable businesses, the critics say.

"This was a battle between two different styles of development," said Arcadie Barbarosie, executive director of the [Public Policy Institute](#), a Chisinau-based research group. "On one side was a Russian-style model of a vertical governing scheme; on the other was a model based upon the European Union's emphasis on deep democratic development."

Set off by allegations of voter fraud, the April riots, which left government buildings burned and at least three people dead, appeared to be [a turning point](#).

In line with the Constitution, Mr. Voronin dissolved Parliament and set new elections last month after the Communist Party twice fell one vote short of the parliamentary majority needed to elect a new president. Mr. Voronin is obliged to step down, having served two terms, though he will remain in power until Parliament chooses a new president.

It is still unclear what accounted for the Communist loss, though a major factor may have been the defection of Marian Lupu, a popular former Parliament speaker who joined the small Democratic Party after the April elections.

Mr. Lupu has pledged to join a coalition with the other pro-Western forces, but he has cautioned against ignoring Russia.

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