

## Moldovan Diaspora Organizations: an Asset for the Country's European Integration

In the past 15 years, the phenomenon of massive emigration has affected the Republic of Moldova in a very profound, yet almost unexplored and poorly apprehended way. Unfortunately, the Moldovan government has only very recently (since 2009) adopted a balanced and objective attitude towards Moldovan emigrants and diaspora organizations. Thus, much precious time has been irreversibly wasted, while important progress in addressing migration issues at a national, government level in the Republic of Moldova would have been possible since the mid 1990's. The burden of the irresponsibility in the past makes it difficult today to naturally accept simple truths that are generally accepted and acted upon in most of the countries with large émigré communities. A question arises inevitably: are Moldovan migrants or Moldovan diaspora organizations well enough prepared to participate in policy formulation processes, aside with government institutions? The answer to this question derives from the acknowledgement of two fundamental notions, perfectly suitable to characterize contemporary Moldovan diaspora: relevance and legitimacy. Moldovan diaspora organizations are relevant, because they **represent** the Moldovan emigrated communities. They are also legitimate, as they are a reflection of **participation** of Moldovans abroad in the life of their community.

The success of a mutually beneficial collaboration between two parties is conditioned by reciprocity. As we have stated it above, the Moldovan government nowadays fully acknowledges the importance of diaspora organizations' potential contribution to forging national policies in the domain of migration. On the other side, why should diaspora organizations collaborate with the Moldovan government on matters of migrants' policy-making? What are the possible motivations of these organizations, what are the specific reasons that would eventually justify diaspora organizations' interest for an active cooperation with the home country government? We have identified five major issues that are capable to forge synergetic actions on behalf of both parties that may lead to positive results in a near future:

**1. Institutional weakness in the domain of migration.** Nowadays, diaspora issues are handled by the Bureau of Inter-ethnic Relations of the Republic of Moldova. This institution has been created in the early 1990's, its main objective and scope being the integration of ethnic minorities into the society of the newly-independent republic. Starting in the early 2000's, an incorrect approach of the emigration phenomenon by the Moldovan government has led to the attribution to the Bureau of Inter-ethnic Relations of the management of a domain (diaspora and migration policies), for which this institution had neither the suitable capacities, nor the motivation. At the same time, there are several other state institutions (Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Economy, etc.) and international organizations (IOM, UNDP, SPES, EU, etc.) working in the same domain of migration policies and diaspora issues. It is obvious that a unification and coordination of all government resources concerned with diaspora issues would make it possible for a coherent migration policy to emerge. In recent past, several events with the participation of a large number of diaspora organizations have seen the demand for an independent governmental institution dealing solely with diaspora issues. Recently, the creation of a State Agency for Diaspora has been announced by the Moldovan government.

**2. Diaspora as a vector of democratic change.** Recent parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2010 have clearly demonstrated that if given the opportunity, Moldovan migrants will eagerly participate in the political processes in their home country. Before 2010, only 34 Electoral Bureaus have functioned outside of the Republic of Moldova, allowing for just about 16,000 voters (1.09% of the total number of voters) to exercise their constitutional right to vote in national elections. In the early parliamentary elections held on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010, for the first time the government has collaborated with many diaspora organizations, thus increasing the number of overseas Electoral Bureaus up to 84. More than 64,000 emigrated Moldovans voted outside of the country, representing 3.70% of the total number of voters. A close analysis of the voting results inside Moldova and abroad clearly indicates that while the Party of Communists got about 40% of the votes in Moldova, their results among the diaspora voters did not exceed 7% of the votes. More than 84% of the voters in the diaspora have expressed their option for one of

the three parties forming today the ruling European-oriented Alliance for European Integration. This is indicative of the capacity of the diaspora to contribute to the process of democratization of the country, by increasing the percentage of democratic, pro-European parties in the Moldovan parliament. In the future, electronic voting may allow for a massive participation of emigrated Moldovans in the electoral processes of their home country, thus influencing by their political implication Moldova's future geopolitical orientation.

**3. Promoting Moldova's image abroad.** The number of Moldovan embassies and consulates is far from being sufficient for an effective communication in favor of the country's image. In several countries hosting large Moldovan diaspora communities, there is simply no Moldovan embassy or consulate (Canada, Spain, Ireland, etc.). In these particular countries, the entire responsibility for the communication and representation of Moldova is laid upon diaspora organizations. Here, we talk about what is sometimes called "popular diplomacy", i.e. the image of the country is forged by non-governmental organizations, foundations, cultural centers, as well as by individuals themselves. From the economic point of view, spreading out the good word about Moldova's advantages in the region is beneficial, as this might attract foreign investors. In this perspective, close cooperation between the Moldovan Investment and Exportation Promotion Organization (MIEPO) and diaspora organizations would necessarily bring positive results for the country. Moldova's positive image can also be promoted by the media, created by government or diaspora organizations.

**4. Programs to sustain investment of migrant money and return of labor force.** It is actually estimated that the number of working Moldovans that have emigrated during the past 15 years rises up to about 40% of the labor force. Also, the remittances sent to their home country by Moldovan emigrants amount up to more than 35% of the GDP (2006). The greatest part of this money is used for subsistence purposes, and thus is sustaining only the consumption in Moldova. Production capacities of Moldovan industry being quasi-inexistent, this leads only to an increase in the volume of imported goods. Specific programs have been implemented by the government and funded by international development partners, aiming to stimulate investment of remittances in the economy. Among these, PARE 1+1 is the most important one. Future development of Moldova depends also on the human resources, present in the country. The issue concerning the return of labor force to Moldova has been addressed within the Mobility Partnership, with funding from the European Union and implementation by the Swedish Public Employment Service.

**5. Highly-qualified Moldovans from abroad (scientific diaspora).** In recent past, there have been several attempts to encourage the return of members of Moldovan scientific diaspora. The most important of these actions is the project, implemented during the 2010 – 2011 period by the IOM, named "Temporary return of representatives of Moldovan scientific diaspora". Subsequent action needs to be undertaken, in order to allow for exchanges and communication of Moldovan scientists from around the world on a permanent basis. In this context, a database of Moldovan scientists, members of the diaspora, and an Internet portal for exchange of ideas, projects and expertise need to be created in the nearest future. Moldovan scientists living abroad can bring their contribution to the development of their home country, by issuing regularly a set of recommendations for specific domains (education, economy, justice, etc.). This would constitute a first step in the creation of a global "intellectual forum" concentrating itself on identifying the best solutions to Moldova's problems.

Interaction between the Moldovan government and Moldovan diaspora organizations in the five fields specified above will necessarily lead to positive results, thus conducting the country towards the fulfillment of its most important objective: integration into the European Union.

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