

LCRM – Legal Resources Centre from Moldova

Public Alert: Stop Attacks on Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova!

mihaela cibotaru · Friday, October 23rd, 2020

The civil society represented by the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and other organizations is concerned about the unprecedented attacks on non-governmental organizations, development partners and democracy launched by MP Bogdan Șirdea.

On 21 October 2020, Socialist MP Bogdan Șirdea unleashed the toughest, most thorough and deliberate frontal attack ever made by a Moldovan politician against the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens of this country, and the modernization of our state in line with the European standards.

The attack employs faking and defamatory accusations to discredit civil society on the whole and targeting the organizations working in the field of human rights protection, justice reform, anticorruption, freedom of the press, pro-European reforms, and social and healthcare reforms.

The attack borrows techniques specific to totalitarian regimes that consist in disinformation and discrediting the adversary before acting to eliminate him/her:

- 1. Depicting the adversary as the enemy of the people and the Republic of Moldova:** Bogdan Șirdea falsely and slanderously claims that civil society acts as “an army financed from outside” that “engages in information warfare” and “works for certain donors against national interests,” all while “stating” that it fights for “democratization, monitoring, human rights”.
- 2. Cultivating fears, distrust, and resentments aimed at the public enemy identified as civil society.** Bogdan Șirdea falsely and manipulatively says that civil society controls the Moldovan state.
- 3. Cultivating hatred towards civil society and dividing the society, unscrupulously making use of the poverty the Republic of Moldova is confronting with:** The entire public rhetoric spouted by Bogdan Șirdea is directed to attain this result, still, his preferred methods are manipulation of financial data and erroneous and ill-intended comparisons with the budgets of public entities.
- 4. Discrediting civil society and its opinion leaders by transfer of image attributes and scandals that have discredited the political class over onto them:** corruption, oligarchy, the one-billion-euro theft, where justice failed to shed light so far, thus allowing politicians to make public statements with whatever “indictments” they saw fit against their adversaries.

5. **Discrediting development partners—both countries that support the democratization of the Republic of Moldova and the European Union**, with whom our country has an [Association Agreement](#) that explicitly provides for the development of civil society and cooperation between the state and the nonprofit sector as integral elements of the development and strengthening of a rule-of-law state.
6. **Pretending that his defamatory statements are in fact the result of scientific research, which is a cover-up to prevent the legitimate denunciation of disinformation, data manipulation, and reinterpretation of reality in a false vein.** Beyond false numbers and statements about the NGOs attacked to support his theses and although he claims that he has carried out a study on the civil society of the Republic of Moldova, MP Bogdan Șirdea has never spoken about so-called “charity foundations” established by politicians and used in their election campaigns. Even the spouse of President Igor Dodon has such a foundation, and it is hardly believable that a serious scientific research could have overlooked it.
7. **Promising that this was not an isolated fit and that he will continue attacks, which is indicative of a complex and orchestrated campaign likely aimed at weakening and even destroying civil society.**
8. **Releasing a so-called book in a press conference in the full swing of the election campaign, just days before the presidential election, which serves as a diversion** to distract public attention from the recently published journalistic [investigations](#) about President Igor Dodon and to drag civil society into political strife against its will.

We, the signatories of this public alert, draw the attention of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova and foreign partners of our country that the **attack launched by MP Bogdan Șirdea is not merely an rhetorical exercise of totalitarian inspiration but an assault on the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, the Moldovan legal framework, the rule of law, and the fundamental rights and freedoms of Moldovan citizens**, because:

1. Civil society organizations are based on citizen's fundamental rights to opinion, freedom of expression, and association guaranteed under the [Constitution of the Republic of Moldova](#). Any citizen has the right to get involved in any cause he/she cares about. Any citizen has the right to act, to criticize, and to keep the state under scrutiny. The state is not above citizens, and citizens have the right to organize themselves into organizations to be able to act professionally and efficiently.
2. Civil society organizations must abide by a legal framework, and if they deviate from it, state institutions are empowered and must act to ensure the observance of the law. Under the law, liability is individual rather than collective.
3. Civil society organizations are meant to complement the work and expertise of the state in the fields where they are needed to ensure better services for its citizens.
4. Civil society organizations have played a key role in defending human rights, reforming the justice sector, and democratizing the Republic of Moldova to bring it closer to the European Union in accordance with the will of the majority of people of this country. If democratic reforms did not move as fast as Moldovan citizens would like them to, to get rid of poverty and the uncertainty of tomorrow, it is because of the stubbornness with which the political class has dragged them out.
5. Civil society organizations receive foreign funding to promote democracy and human rights as long as these areas are insufficiently functional in the Republic of Moldova. Once the Republic of Moldova becomes a functional democracy, foreign donors will reduce funds for these areas, as was the case of other countries that made transition from totalitarianism to democracy. It is

therefore the politicians who oppose the democratization of the Republic of Moldova who send the donors the message that there is still need to support this process and civil society.

6. Civil society is a prerequisite for democracy everywhere in the world. If citizens cannot organize themselves in associations and fight for their causes, then there is no democracy in that country.
7. In fact, the money civil society attracted from donors has filled the financing gaps that the public budget of the Republic of Moldova, being sparse as it is, could never have covered, thus enabling our country to access the expertise, services, and projects that otherwise would have been impossible. Moreover, part of donor's money for NGOs went into the state budget as NGOs pay taxes and create new jobs.
8. The [Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union](#) explicitly provides for the strengthening of civil society. The [Eastern Partnership](#), to which the Republic of Moldova is a party, also provides for mechanisms meant to develop civil society in the region. Therefore, the state has taken on international obligations to respect and allow the development of civil society.

Given the above, the signatories of this public alert:

- **Call on the Parliament, the Government, the President of the Republic of Moldova, Igor Dodon, PSRM and other politicians to distance themselves from and to refute the manipulative statements made by PSRM MP Bogdan Șirdea and not to encourage or pick them up. Considering his role in the state, the stand President Igor Dodon chooses to take is essential to show publicly that he respects the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Moldova. His stand on this subject is even more important considering that he has promoted the release of Bogdan Șirdea's so-called book.**
- **Call on the political class to stop the attacks and defamation against civil society. It is not NGOs but those who oppose democratization, justice reform, anticorruption efforts, and individual rights and freedoms who keep the Republic of Moldova in poverty and underdevelopment!**
- **Call on PSRM MP Bogdan Șirdea to stop this defamation campaign and to withdraw the so-called book from the market, as it uses and spreads false information, defamation, and manipulation. Call on PSRM MP Bogdan Șirdea to refute the false statements he made at the press conference of 21 October 2020.**
- **Call on the media outlets to carefully verify politicians' statements that strike at civil society, as campaign drives in full swing and the fight seems to have shifted onto the territory of fundamental freedoms. If politicians succeed in limiting freedom of association on the pretext of defending national interests and the state, all other freedoms, including freedom of expression, will be at risk.**

Signatories:

All member organizations of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (92 organizations): <https://www.eap-csf.md/membrii-eap-moldova/>

Other organizations:

- Amnesty International Moldova
- Associations of Investigative Reporters and Editorial Security RISE Moldova

- AO Media Alternativa
- Institute of Oral History of Moldova (IIOM)
- Mold-Street.com
- Human Rights Embassy
- Moldova.org
- Centre for Corruption Analysis and Prevention
- IM Swedish Development Partner
- "Partnership for Every Child" („Parteneriate pentru Fiecare Copil”) ([see the Annex](#))

The list is open for new signatories. To sign the public alert, please, contact jantoan.veronica@gmail.com.

The National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 and currently has 92 member organizations, of which 7 are umbrella organizations for other 255 organizations. The mission of the Platform is to strengthen the European integration and democratic development of the Republic of Moldova and to contribute to advocacy and monitoring for the implementation of the EU – RM Association Agreement and other documents applicable to the Eastern Partnership and the EU – RM relationship. More information about the Platform is available at <https://www.eap-csf.md/en/>.

The National Platform's contact information: <https://www.eap-csf.md/en/contact/>.

The Public Appeal in English is available [HERE](#).

The Public Appeal in Romanian is available [HERE](#).

The Public Appeal in Russian is available [HERE](#).

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