



Deputies in the plenary session of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.
Photo source: Parliament of the Republic of Moldova

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Justice reform: one step forward, two steps back

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The fight against corruption, vetting, and justice reform as a whole represent key pillars of the Republic of Moldova's European path and of the broader transformation of society toward a democratic, Western-oriented model. In this context, the March edition of the FES/APE Foreign Policy Bulletin provides a comprehensive overview of these processes, bringing together four contributions that examine recent developments in the justice system from multiple perspectives.

The contributions reflect both the continued importance of reform and the challenges that accompany its implementation. In her interview for the bulletin, anti-corruption expert Mariana Kalughin points to potential risks related to political influence and notes that instruments such as vetting and PACCO may have complex effects on the independence of the judicial system.

In the editorial of this edition, journalist Mariana Rață reviews the process through which several recent reforms have been advanced, highlighting concerns related to timing, transparency, and legislative procedure. From the debate surrounding the Hebel case to the initiative to merge prosecutor's offices into

a future PACCO structure, the editorial draws attention to aspects of the reform process that may influence its overall credibility.

From a political perspective, Alexandru Berlinschii, Member of Parliament from *Our Party*, emphasizes in an interview that justice reform remains necessary, while also underlining the importance of broader political consensus in advancing such reforms. He also raises questions regarding the role of vetting mechanisms and certain appointments in shaping perceptions of the process.

At the same time, former Minister of Justice and President of the Constitutional Court, Alexandru Tănase, offers an assessment of the reform, noting that while it has contributed to addressing some systemic issues, it has also faced challenges related to pace, communication, and public perception.

Through these contributions, the March edition aims to present a balanced and nuanced picture of justice reform in the Republic of Moldova—situated between its strategic importance, European expectations, and the practical challenges of implementation.

News in brief:

The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, stated on March 20 that he supports accelerating the European path of the Republic of Moldova, citing progress in reforms and the country's increasingly active role in European security. Speaking to TVR Moldova at the end of the Brussels summit, he welcomed Chișinău's decision to join the "Coalition of the Willing" for Ukraine, which he considers an important signal in the current security context.

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The increase in fuel prices, as a result of tensions in the Persian Gulf, could directly impact public transport fares on regional and national routes. This was stated by the Minister of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Vladimir Bolea, on March 20, in a Facebook intervention. The official noted that concrete proposals will be presented next week, following a series of discussions with transport associations and private operators.

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On March 20, Parliament adopted in first reading the draft laws on denouncing the Agreement on the Establishment of the CIS and its Protocol, as well as the draft law on denouncing the CIS Statute—documents that grant the Republic of Moldova its member status. The legislative initiatives were presented in plenary by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mihai Popșoi.

Justice is an indispensable element of the rule of law that must deliver justice, not resonate with the political system



Alexandru Tănase, The former President of the Constitutional Court and Minister of Justice

Photo: Facebook

The former President of the Constitutional Court and Minister of Justice, Alexandru Tănase, gave an extensive interview for the Foreign Policy Bulletin, outlining his vision on justice reform in the Republic of Moldova. The former official emphasized that the greatest danger lies in the politicization of justice reform. He also noted that there is a growing perception that the emphasis on speed—the expense of quality—is not viewed favourably in Brussels. In his opinion, priority should be given, first and foremost, to resolving the everyday cases of citizens seeking

justice in courts, as well as commercial disputes. At the same time, Alexandru Tănase stressed that, particularly in cases of high-level corruption, the priority must be the quality of justice, in order to avoid creating the perception of selective or politicized justice. We invite you to explore these issues in detail in the interview below:

- Mr. Tănase, if we were to take stock of the last five years of governance in terms of justice reform, what do you consider to be the main achievements, as well as the biggest failures?

- I do not know if there is an exhaustive answer to this question. The situation is highly nuanced, and the answer lies somewhere in the middle. There have also been positive aspects of this justice reform. First of all, we can speak about a cleansing of the judiciary through the removal of certain groups and toxic individuals who effectively held the justice system hostage for 20 years. They shaped it into the form we have seen. I believe the reform has had positive effects as well.

When we speak about negative effects or failures, I think these relate more to the procedures through which these actions were carried out. More precisely, what began as a judicial reform has gradually turned into something that resembles more a system of control than a genuine effort to build a new justice system.

A truly sustainable reform—one embraced by society as a whole and free from persistent suspicions of clientelism—has not been achieved. This is the core problem.

Realities and perceptions

- How do you assess the vetting process of judges and prosecutors? Do you believe it is being carried out on sound grounds and that it will truly lead to a genuine cleansing of the justice system?

- It is difficult to predict the final outcome of this process. One thing, however, is certain: the lack of transparency and the way authorities have communicated about the process have significantly undermined its credibility. If we look not so much at reality, but at public perception, it becomes clear that the level of trust is very low. This undoubtedly represents a major failure of the current government.

Perhaps things should have been designed differently and implemented according to a clearer agenda and timeline. Moreover, the fact that the bodies responsible for this process have been staffed with individuals perceived as being exclusively close to or controlled by the current authorities—without the inclusion of more neutral figures or representatives of the opposition—has not helped to strengthen its credibility.

Between cosmetic fixes and realities

- How do you assess the episode of reappointing Herman von Hebel to the vetting commission for prosecutors, and why do you think PAS insisted on this appointment despite widespread opposition? To what extent could this influence the European Union's assessment of the rule of law?

- This episode will certainly influence the European Union's assessment of the rule of law. There should be no doubt about that. Even though those in power have tried to soften public perception through various justifications, we witnessed an unprecedented situation in which there was virtually no supportive voice for this appointment.

Moreover, there is no solid argument for imposing a person who, in public perception, is considered compromised, simply because he is loyal and executes what is required of him.

For this reason, I believe the very existence of this issue represents a major mistake, especially given the way in which the appointment was carried out, including through amendments to special legislation to enable it.

This is all the more problematic given the serious doubts surrounding this individual, particularly regarding alleged irregularities during his time as an administrator at the International Criminal Court. In this context, a more neutral candidate could have been selected, allowing society to perceive the process as balanced and avoiding the impression that laws are tailored for a single individual. This is, essentially, the core problem.

Institutional capacity and lack of attractiveness

- Does Moldova have sufficient capacity and human resources to replace the judges and prosecutors who have left the system following vetting? How might this affect the system's functionality?

- I do not believe we have sufficient resources for a rapid replacement. In fact, the issue of rapid replacement does not even arise, as many of the departures have already begun to be compensated.

There remains, however, a problem at the Supreme Court of Justice. Here, the issue is less about resources and more about credibility. There is little interest in participating in the selection process, as it is perceived as largely formal, while decisions are believed to be politically influenced.

It is widely understood that decisions are controlled from a single center of power. This explains the lack of interest in submitting applications and participating in competitions.

As for prosecutors, there is indeed a current deficit, but this is likely to be addressed relatively quickly. The National Institute of Justice trains new prosecutors annually, and, in parallel, some cases can be prioritized while others are postponed.

Of course, none of these solutions is ideal. One cannot create overnight a body of 200 judges and 200 prosecutors. Nevertheless, I do not believe we are facing a situation that would generate major dysfunctions that cannot be overcome.

- How do you assess the handling of high-profile cases today? Can they be examined swiftly without compromising quality?

- I have certain reservations when I observe the speed with which some cases are examined. Based on what is visible in the public space, I cannot say with certainty whether these proceedings are also of high quality. In criminal matters, quality must prevail. A Stakhanovite pace never produces good results.

While society may applaud such developments, genuine justice cannot be built on low-quality decisions or on unlawful solutions adopted merely to meet public expectations.

It remains to be seen whether these cases are solidly substantiated and whether the evidence is truly relevant. In complex cases, where hearings take place almost daily, this pace may satisfy public demand, but the experience of other countries shows that this is not how justice works.

Complex criminal cases require thorough debate across multiple dimensions, particularly since they involve the liberty of individuals. Parties must have sufficient time to conduct their own expert analyses and build a proper defense.

Under such circumstances, when a judgment is delivered in a case comprising 300 volumes in just 16 days, there are legitimate grounds to question whether due process was fully respected.

Many institutions, few results

- Do you see the creation of PACCO as a genuine reform? Should APO and PCCOCS be maintained, or reorganized into a stronger institution similar to Romania's DNA?

- PCCOCS does not have responsibilities in combating corruption—that role belongs to the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office. We also have the National Anti-Corruption Center and numerous other institutions involved in this field. In practice, every second official is engaged, in one way or another, in anti-corruption efforts, yet the results are well known.

It is therefore unclear to me why merging PCCOCS and PA would lead to greater effectiveness. The core issue is one of human resources. If neither institution has sufficient specialists, renaming or restructuring them repeatedly will not produce better outcomes.

As for the proposed merger, I do not see how it could be implemented coherently. Its logic appears less institutional and more political—specifically aimed at removing the former head of APO, Veronica Dragalin. This seems

to have been the primary motivation behind the initiative.

The EU and the perspective of justice reform

- Are current reforms sufficient to convince the EU that Moldova can build an independent justice system?

- The rule of law does not mean delivering convictions on an assembly line. Nor does it mean endlessly merging institutions or expanding bureaucracies. It does not mean assigning ranks to every second official.

The rule of law is about the genuine ability of justice to deliver justice. And justice does not necessarily align with the expectations of political power.

It will be difficult to convince the European Union that a genuine reform has taken place based solely on criminal justice outcomes. Criminal cases account for only 5–7 percent of all cases in courts.

The real core lies in civil and commercial cases, where many problems persist. There appears to be little attention from authorities in this area.

EU evaluators will not rely on news headlines. They will assess reforms in a multidimensional way—examining procedural law, substantive law, and institutional compatibility with EU standards.

This is a complex process, and I have serious reservations about whether current institutional capacities and human resources are sufficient to deliver results that the EU would recognize as genuine progress.

Without politicization

- How can the perception that justice reform is politically driven be avoided?

- This perception can only be avoided if Parliament respects and adopts laws in their

original form, without ad hoc amendments designed to promote specific individuals—as seen in the recent case involving Herman von Hebel.

Otherwise, we are no longer dealing with genuine reform, but with the risk of bringing the judiciary under political control. No communication strategy or image campaign can offset this perception as long as such practices continue.

- If we look back at the last 10–15 years of justice reforms in the Republic of Moldova, what do you consider to be the main lessons we should learn?

- This issue goes beyond the last 10–15 years—it concerns the entire period since Moldova's independence in 1991. Justice is a fundamental pillar of the rule of law. It must deliver justice and must not align itself with political power.

Judicial independence is not about independence from local councils or ministries—it is about independence from political authority, the ability to make decisions free from political influence. This remains the core problem, unresolved for over three decades.

Every change in political power is followed by investigations against former leaders. With each new shift, the Prosecutor General is replaced. No Prosecutor General has completed their full mandate without becoming involved in actions against political opponents.

This is the fundamental issue. A justice system that truly delivers justice must act impartially—holding both former and current leaders accountable based on facts, not political affiliation.

Over more than 30 years of independence, Moldova has moved, in many respects, in the opposite direction. This remains the central challenge.

- Thank you!

Editorial

Von Hebel and PACCO: Black Marks on Justice Reform

*Editorial by Mariana Rață,
TV8 journalist*

Following the latest controversial amendment to the vetting law, it is becoming increasingly clear that Moldova's justice system has entered a phase of emergency-style reforms. Major legislative changes are now often circumstantial, designed to quickly address narrow—typically individual—issues that the governing authorities consider essential. This was the case with the “blitz reform” separating the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (APO) from the National Anti-Corruption Centre (NAC), the rushed initiative to create PACCO, and nearly all recent amendments to the vetting law. The precedent dates back to 2021, when Parliament amended the Law on the Prosecutor's Office to enable the dismissal of the Prosecutor General—an amendment later declared unconstitutional.



Mariana Rață, TV8 journalist
Photo: Facebook

An appointment through the back door

On March 5, the PAS parliamentary majority swiftly passed an amendment to the vetting law, reducing the number of votes required to appoint a foreign member to the External Evaluation Commission—from 61 to 51. This change appears tailored to a single candidate among the six proposed by development partners, and notably the only one publicly rejected by the opposition: Herman von Hebel.

No member of the PAS faction explained why the former head of the pre-vetting commission—who has been the subject of multiple public controversies—was considered the most suitable candidate. Nor was it clear why the majority chose to confront civil society, the opposition, and the media, risking potential setbacks in the European Commission's next enlargement report, for the sake of this appointment. The speed of the process was equally striking: the law was amended and Hebel appointed in less than 24 hours, amid unprecedented public criticism over the past four years.

“The EU's love for Moldova is not blind”

Reliable sources suggest that Hebel's appointment may serve a broader purpose: to bring closure to the embarrassing evaluation process of the newly appointed Prosecutor General, who has struggled to justify the purchase of an apartment. Reportedly, the Commission lacked sufficient votes to confirm Alexandru Machedon. Regardless of the underlying motive, the European Commission made it clear that the ends do not justify the means.

Commission spokesperson Markus Lammert reminded Chișinău that such reforms must be conducted transparently and inclusively, with proper consultation of all stakeholders and in line with the Venice Commission's opinion. After several instances in which European partners appeared to overlook the government's hurried “special operations” in structural reform, a clear message has now been delivered: the EU's support for Moldova is not unconditional. The Hebel case illustrates that the government is willing to sideline transparency, civil society criticism, and even the Venice Commission when political decisions take precedence.

A pattern: from the “Hebel amendment” to the APO–NAC split

This is not an isolated incident. In July 2023, through a nearly identical procedure, Parliament decided to separate the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office from the National Anti-Corruption Center. The change was introduced via an amendment by a single MP, just five days before the final vote on an unrelated draft law.

The amendment was neither consulted with the Government nor with civil society, despite fundamentally altering the operational framework of anti-corruption institutions. No impact assessment or proper justification was provided. Unofficially, the move was explained as an attempt to end tensions between the heads of the two institutions. Notably, the amendment was introduced by the same MP involved in the Hebel case.

At the time, several justice-sector NGOs criticized both the reform and the opaque manner in which it was adopted, but their concerns—along with the Venice Commission’s opinion—were ignored. Shortly afterward, the Venice Commission warned of overlapping competencies, fragmentation of anti-corruption efforts, and weakened institutional capacity. Three years on, those risks have materialized: the separation has effectively paralyzed the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office in tackling high-level corruption. According to multiple sources, the Government is now working on legislation to reverse the reform.

PACCO: reform or pretext?

In February 2025, just months before parliamentary elections, the majority introduced another reform initiative proposing the dissolution of the two specialized prosecutor’s offices and the creation of a new structure—PACCO. The proposal emerged amid tensions between the government and the head of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office, as well as accusations that existing institutions were ineffective in combating electoral and political corruption.

Despite strong criticism from both practitioners and experts, the draft law was adopted in first reading just one week after being introduced—without consultations or public debate. The head of APO, Ve-

ronica Dragalin, stated that the reform was intended to remove her from office and resigned in an attempt to block its adoption. Subsequently, the urgency surrounding the initiative faded.

In December 2025, the Venice Commission issued a critical opinion on the PACCO proposal, effectively halting any momentum behind it. Meanwhile, the vetting law itself has undergone seven amendments in just three years.

Justice reform and the instincts of power

None of these “emergency reforms” were developed in consultation with the Ministry of Justice, nor were they part of a coherent reform strategy or action plan. Driven by political expediency or emotional reactions, these measures reveal a lack of clear vision regarding the transformation of the justice system.

Today, the justice sector resembles a patient treated simultaneously by multiple doctors who disagree on both diagnosis and treatment.

It is no longer clear where responsibility for shaping justice reform lies. Four years of single-party governance have fostered unhealthy instincts in political decision-making. In sensitive areas such as justice, there is a growing pattern of bypassing legislative procedures, limiting transparency, ignoring civil society input, and consulting the Venice Commission only after decisions have already been made.

A clear vision is urgently needed

A fair justice system cannot be built through back-door reforms, nor can one expect society and European partners to indefinitely overlook such deviations. Successful reform requires a clear and coherent vision.

Policy development must be inclusive, transparent, and grounded in public debate. The Government must engage in careful planning and define clear objectives for reform. Measures driven by urgency or tailored interests are no longer acceptable.

If Moldova aims to conclude EU accession negotiations by 2028, it is effectively attempting to run a marathon at sprint speed. There is no room for missteps—and even less for derailment.

Any reform risks losing credibility if it is implemented in disregard of fundamental principles

Mariana Kalughin, anti-corruption expert at Transparency International Moldova, gave an interview to the FES/APE Foreign Policy Bulletin, in which we discussed justice reform and its relationship with political influence. The conversation covered the effectiveness of the vetting process, the way it is currently implemented as a precondition for justice reform, the evolution of major corruption cases in courts, and the conditions necessary to ensure judicial independence in the Republic of Moldova. We invite you to read the full interview below.

Anti-corruption: between instruments and implementation

- Ms. Kalughin, how do you assess, overall, the fight against corruption in the Republic of Moldova? Do you consider that the current institutional framework operates on sound and effective grounds?

- In my view, the fight against corruption in the Republic of Moldova is currently more declarative and populist than substantive. There is no shortage of relevant legislation in this field—the Integrity Law, the Law on the verification of holders and candidates for public office, the Law on polygraph testing, the Law on the declaration of assets and personal interests, the Law on institutional integrity assessment, the Law on whistleblowers, the Law on decision-making transparency, and the Law on access to information of public interest.

However, these instruments are not applied effectively. We have a complex anti-corruption framework—from public competitions and codes of ethics to mechanisms for declaring undue influence and gifts—yet its implementation remains incomplete.

There are also multiple authorities with anti-corruption responsibilities, including the National Integrity



Mariana Kalughin, anti-corruption expert at Transparency International Moldova
Photo: Facebook

Authority, the National Anti-Corruption Center, the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Intelligence and Security Service. At the same time, the manner in which the leadership of these institutions is appointed makes them politically vulnerable and undermines their credibility.

Moreover, the National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Programme lacks a genuine strategic dimension, which further limits its impact.

A comprehensive and objective evaluation of the entire system is needed—one that assesses the impact of the legal framework, the performance of institutions, and the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies. However, such an exercise cannot be carried out as long as the field continues to be treated primarily through an electoral lens.

Insufficient reform

- How do you assess the vetting process? What are its advantages and limitations?

- I am, rather, an opponent than a supporter of the vetting process in the justice sector. Justice

reform, like any reform, should represent a profound transformation aimed at improving an existing state of affairs.

Vetting cannot resolve the fundamental problems of the sector. There are no real deficiencies in the evaluation of the integrity of members of self-governing bodies, judges, or prosecutors. Nor are there deficiencies in monitoring integrity incidents within the system. There are already laws and institutions designed for these purposes.

The real issue lies in the implementation of existing mechanisms—such as the declaration of assets and interests, institutional integrity assessments, and the evaluation of individual performance—in a way that ensures that professionals in the system maintain their integrity despite corruption risks.

In my opinion, vetting disadvantages the justice sector through the precedent it creates. Any future political power could replicate this approach, invoking moralistic arguments and purist concerns. Vetting ultimately leads to the political alignment of the judiciary. As a consequence, we risk ending up with a judicial system that is fearful, obedient, and lacking in courage.

The von Hebel controversy

- How do you interpret the controversy surrounding the reappointment of Herman von Hebel to the vetting commission? Why do you think the government insisted on this appointment despite criticism from experts, civil society, and the media?

- This case once again confirms the politicized and flawed nature of the vetting process. It is not clear why the government insisted on this appointment despite strong public opposition. Regardless of the underlying reasons, the case represents an affront to common sense.

The manner in which the decision was carried out—through accelerated legislative amendments, without respecting the requirements of the legislative process or the necessary quorum—was, in itself, defiant.

Lack of convincing arguments

- How do you assess the need to restructure and reform specialized prosecutor's offices? Is the creation of PACCO, bringing together APO and PCCOCS, justified?

- The legislative initiative is insufficiently substantiated. The author refers to an analysis of the system of specialized prosecutor's offices in relation to forms of crime affecting national security. However, the explanatory note does not provide relevant data in this regard.

Only one possible trend could justify such an initiative—the significant involvement of organized criminal groups in corruption offenses.

However, the profile of corruption in the Republic of Moldova is different. The PACCO project is also problematic from the perspective of ensuring the most important conditions for combating corruption: independence, professional training, and adequate resources.

An unjustified institutional reorganization, such as the one proposed, risks harming personnel. Reconfiguring specialized prosecutor's offices would result primarily in filtering the corps of prosecutors, rather than improving effectiveness.

In my view, the initiative pursued political—particularly electoral—objectives. This is also reflected in the explanatory note, where the author does not conceal that the idea of reconfiguration was driven largely by decisions of the Supreme Security Council concerning political and electoral corruption, in the context of the electoral cycle between the 2024 presidential elections and the 2025 parliamentary elections.

In reality, the aim appears to be the political alignment of specialized prosecutor's offices, particularly the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office. Supporting evidence includes public statements by the President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of Parliament expressing dissatisfaction with the performance of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, as well as the statements of the former head of the institution, who acknowledged being encouraged to resign.

I hope that, following the opinion of the Venice Commission, Members of Parliament will abandon the PACCO initiative.

Speed vs. fairness

- How do you assess the handling of high-profile cases today? Can we expect them to be examined swiftly?

- I would prefer not to comment on individual cases. It is difficult to assess a case without knowing its substance. Celerity is indeed a condition of efficient justice. However, it would be deeply problematic if, in pursuing speed, the principles and standards of a fair trial were sacrificed or the rights of the parties were violated.

It is regrettable that some important cases—such as those involving Vladimir Plahotniuc—are being examined within a justice system that is itself undergoing vetting. This, from the outset, affects the credibility of the process.

The rule of the three “I’s”

- What are the main vulnerabilities of Moldova’s judicial system? On which dimensions do you think EU partners remain critical?

- It is often said that justice should function according to the rule of the three “I’s”: Independence, Impartiality, and Integrity. Among these, independence is fundamental. A judiciary cannot be impartial or possess integrity if it is not independent.

Standards in this field require the implementation of an appropriate legal framework for preventing corruption within the judiciary. At the same time, all necessary measures must be taken to promote a culture of judicial integrity and respect for the role of the judiciary.

However, the fight against corruption should not be used as a pretext to undermine judicial independence. Lustration is not necessarily the most appropriate anti-corruption tool.

A process in which all office holders are assessed from a corruption perspective—and those who fail are dismissed and possibly prosecuted—can be instrumentalized and misused to remove politically undesirable individuals. As long as judges and prosecutors are subject to a prolonged and potentially politicized external evaluation process, I am not convinced that they can be fully independent. I hope that external partners understand these concerns.

Risk of losing credibility

- To what extent do justice and anti-corruption reforms risk being perceived as politically influenced? How can their credibility be protected?

- Any reform risks losing credibility if it is implemented in disregard of fundamental principles. Ensuring the principle of separation and balance of powers is essential. In the Republic of Moldova, the legislative, executive, and judicial powers must be separate, while also cooperating within the limits established by the Constitution.

In line with international standards, dialogue between branches of power must respect this principle. This is a key condition for maintaining the credibility of reforms, especially in the justice sector. The judiciary must be free from inappropriate connections and undue influence from other branches of power.

Criticism between institutions must be expressed in a climate of mutual respect. Unbalanced or irresponsible public statements risk undermining public trust and, in some cases, may even affect the constitutional balance of a democratic state.

Simplistic arguments, demagogic slogans, and populist promises should have no place in inter-institutional dialogue. The fight against corruption must not be used to undermine fundamental values.

Gap between expectations and reality

- Why does such a large gap persist between public expectations regarding anti-corruption and the results seen in courts?

- The gap between expectations and reality is the result of flawed political discourse. Unfortunately, due to deficiencies in the recording of criminal statistics, it is difficult to determine precisely the share of corruption offenses among all registered crimes. Based on annual reports of the Prosecutor General’s Office, I would estimate that corruption offenses do not exceed 3% of the total.

Naturally, high-level corruption represents an even smaller share. This does not mean the phenomenon is not dangerous or can be ignored. However, corruption should not be used as a universal explanation for every problem we face. Integrity is essential for good governance, but it cannot replace professionalism and responsibility.

- Thank you!

We must not have a televised justice system—or, even worse, a politicized one

Alexandr Berlinschii, Member of Parliament from Our Party and a representative of the parliamentary opposition, spoke with us about how justice reform in the Republic of Moldova is perceived from the opposition's perspective. We discussed his views on the selection of international expert Herman von Hebel to the prosecutors' vetting commission—despite warnings from the opposition, civil society, and the media—as well as his perspective on anti-corruption efforts, expectations for reform, and the need for broader parliamentary consensus. We invite you to read the full interview below:



Alexandr Berlinschii, Member of Parliament from Our Party
Photo: Facebook

The need for broad consensus

- Mr. Berlinschii, how do you assess the controversy surrounding the reappointment of the expert Herman von Hebel to the vetting commission? Why do you think the government insisted on this candidacy despite negative opinions coming from multiple directions?

- First of all, the speed with which PAS moved on that amendment is suspicious—an amendment to a law that has absolutely nothing to do with the vetting of prosecutors or judges. The law to which the amendment was attached (through which members of the prosecutors' vetting commission could be elected with 51 votes instead of 61, as previously—ed.) concerned the physical security of judges in courts.

Therefore, it involved amendments to the Contravention Code. More precisely, provisions

were introduced to impose fines if a judge was threatened or harassed. PAS, however, inserted into this law an amendment that had no connection to its subject matter, but instead altered the number of votes required to appoint members of the prosecutors' vetting commission.

I would like to recall that the law had been submitted to the Venice Commission, which recommended that it be adopted with broad consensus, including the support of the opposition.

Considering all these elements, I can only conclude that this law was adopted specifically for Mr. Herman von Hebel. Another argument supporting this conclusion is that, during the plenary session, both I and other colleagues requested that two separate decisions be voted: one for the appointment of Mr. Bernard Lavigne (to the Prosecutors' Evaluation Commission—ed.) and another for the appointment of Mr. Herman von Hebel to the same commission.

I regret that the parliamentary majority did not follow our legitimate request. Article 188 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure clearly grants this right to every MP. Therefore, the Speaker of Parliament, Igor Grosu, was obliged to submit it to a vote. In this context, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the law was tailored specifically for Mr. von Hebel.

I hope I am mistaken, but Mr. von Hebel's appointment should have been based on competence and experience, not loyalty. His previous role as a member of the Pre-Vetting Commission should have demonstrated his professionalism, not his loyalty to the government. I trust that loyalty was not the decisive factor in the speed of his appointment. Let us recall that the amendment was submitted on Thursday (reducing the required votes from 61 to 51 for appointing members of the prosecutors' vetting commission—ed.), and by Friday it had already been adopted.

Accordingly, the appointment was made on Friday, and the law was immediately promulgated by President Maia Sandu and published the same day in the Official Gazette.

Another aspect that cannot be overlooked is why similar urgency is not observed when it comes to the composition of the judges' vetting commission. On 29 December 2025, Parliament took note of the resignation of one of its members.

On 18 February 2026, through the same procedure by which members of the prosecutors' vetting commission were designated by external partners, a member was also designated for the judges' vetting commission.

The legal committee is expected to examine three candidates, as there is also a vacancy in the judges' vetting commission. Three individuals have been nominated for this position. However, from 18 February until mid-March, no meeting of the parliamentary legal committee has been scheduled to review these candidacies and propose filling the vacancy in plenary.

What we see are half-measures, accompanied by a narrative in the public space suggesting that the opposition does not support justice reform—which is simply not true. We do not agree with Mr. von Hebel's inclusion in the prosecutors' vetting commission. However, with regard to the other candidate, *Our Party* has no objections and supported his appointment. I reiterate: when it comes to the vetting of judges, no comparable action has been taken.

The need for a credible reform

- How do you assess the vetting process in recent years? What do you consider to be its main positive and negative effects on the justice system?

- We have consistently stated, including during last year's parliamentary election campaign, that justice reform is necessary. No one disputes this necessity.

However, delays in the vetting process raise serious concerns. At the same time, it is important to underline that the success of this reform does not depend solely on the vetting commission, but also on the individuals who have undergone this extraordinary procedure.

Even more concerning is the growing perception that the vetting process is being used as a legal mechanism to appoint individuals considered convenient to the ruling party. This assessment is based both on ongoing public discussions and on broader societal perceptions.

In my view, and considering the recent actions of PAS, there are persistent doubts regarding how justice reform is being implemented in the context of EU accession. Such reform should be built on broad consensus and enjoy solid support in Parliament. Members of the Venice Commission have repeatedly emphasized this point.

In the past, PAS tended to categorize parties as either pro-European or anti-European. Today, however, we observe a different dividing line: between those who support their particular vision of justice reform and those who do not.

This is not a democratic approach; on the contrary, it raises concerns from this perspective.

I hope that the recent episode related to the amendment I mentioned earlier, in connection with Mr. Herman von Hebel, will serve as a lesson for the ruling party, and that it will demonstrate a willingness to return to the negotiating table with all parliamentary parties in order to identify common solutions.

I would also note that the list of candidates for the vetting commission was not discussed with the leaders of all parliamentary factions. This is an area that could be improved—by initiating such discussions, justice reform could truly become a “priority zero,” alongside other key reforms, including at the parliamentary level.

Problems in justice

- How do you assess the fight against corruption in recent years under the current pro-European government? What has been done well, and what do you think has not worked?

- To form a clear opinion, one needs concrete data—which I do not have at hand. I am referring in particular to the number of criminal cases initiated for corruption, how many have reached the courts, and how many have resulted in final judgments.

Recently, Parliament examined the annual report of the National Anti-Corruption Center for 2025. However, I can speak primarily from the perspective of publicly known cases. What is the value of convictions if those individuals have managed to leave the country? This clearly indicates that something is not functioning properly.

In order to combat corruption effectively, decisive measures are needed, addressing the problem at its root. We have seen some isolated cases, including contraventional proceedings initiated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, particularly in relation to electoral corruption. In 2025, significant progress was made in combating electoral corruption compared to 2023–2024.

This progress reflected a coordinated effort among state institutions. Considerable efforts were made, and we have indeed witnessed a tangible reduction in this type of corruption.

However, there are also other cases, such as the construction of the Leova–Bumbăta road. We are still awaiting the expert assessment in this case. There is no visible in-depth investigative activity. Similarly, we have not seen sufficient clarity regarding how fuel oil and gas were procured during previous winter seasons.

There have also been reports in the public space regarding detentions linked to the embezzlement of public funds, particularly in connection with the “European Village” programme, especially in the area of road construction.

Opposition priorities

- From the opposition’s perspective, what are the main initiatives or projects that *Our Party* proposes in the field of justice? What should be Parliament’s priorities in this area?

- As stated from the parliamentary rostrum by the leader of *Our Party*, Renato Usatîi, it is essential, first and foremost, to ensure that judges and employees within law enforcement structures receive decent salaries. At the same time, effective mechanisms for verifying integrity must be established. If this approach is followed, justice reform and the reform of law enforcement bodies can be achieved more quickly and effectively.

As for the initiatives we intend to promote in Parliament, our party’s agenda includes several social projects. There are already a number of draft laws under consideration, but the justice sector remains a particularly important priority. In the coming period, we will also present a series of concrete proposals in this area.

No televised justice

- How do you assess the evolution of high-profile cases in the justice system, and to what extent can we expect them to be examined with celerity?

- I would prefer to refrain from expressing an opinion on this matter, as I believe that justice must be carried out exclusively in the courtroom, and we, as politicians, should avoid making such assessments.

We must not have a televised justice system—or, even worse, a politicized one. I sincerely hope that both prosecutors and defense lawyers fulfill their roles professionally, so that judges can ultimately base their decisions solely on the evidence and materials presented in court.

- Do you believe there are currently risks of politicization of justice in the Republic of Moldova? To what extent do you consider that political influence exists within the system?

- Taking into account recent developments, I believe that the political factor is overreaching when it attempts to create loyalty within certain segments of the justice system.

- How do you think justice reform in the Republic of Moldova is perceived in Brussels? What aspects should the authorities pay particular attention to?

- We are awaiting the assessment to be carried out by the European Commission. When we speak about European integration, we refer to several negotiation clusters.

Recently, a meeting of the Parliament's European Integration Committee took place, during which certain tasks were assigned to the executive authorities.

- Justice reform is a central element of EU accession negotiations. Do you believe that the current approach contributes to accelerating this process, or does it risk complicating it?

- Rather, this approach risks blocking these processes. In my view, the parliamentary majority must understand that, for a reform to succeed and to be understood by society, a clear consensus is essential. It would be both welcome and commendable if the government were to take into account the constructive opinions of the opposition. If this path is followed, the chances of success will be significantly higher.

- Thank you!

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