

# BLACK BOOK

OF PUBLIC MONEY WASTE

IN REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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2023



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.  
Romania and Moldova



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Federal Foreign Office

**DESCRIEREA CIP A CAMEREI NAȚIONALE A CĂRȚII DIN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA**

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# FOREWORD

This annual collection of investigative reports, **“THE BLACK BOOK of Public Money in the Republic of Moldova,”** offers the general public and anti-corruption institutions a synthesized picture of the schemes and practices used by various actors to obtain personal gain from managing public money. It also presents cases of serious negligence in the management of projects with significant investments of European and national funds that thwart infrastructure improvement initiatives and stall community development.

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom and the Association of the Independent Press (API) have been producing the Black Book since 2019. This is the fifth edition; the aim is to thoroughly inform the Moldovan public and document how central or local administrations manage public affairs and, at the same time, to support investigative journalists. In this way, we contribute to the consolidation of a transparent and democratic society where there is accountability for things done improperly and public pressure to promote integrity and to fight corruption. At the same time, thanks to the vigilance of investigative journalists, this book is a tool for monitoring possible deviations from established norms of good governance and sends a message to the authorities that their work is being watched and can be investigated at the first sign of wrongdoing.

Some of the investigations in this project have also been produced in video format; the public can watch them via the QR codes at the end of the book. By presenting them in different formats, we make the investigations easier to digest and use the opportunity to demonstrate the evidence and documents on which investigative journalists base their findings.

In conclusion, I cannot help noting how in the eight years that we have been supporting journalism in the Republic of Moldova with our projects, the independent media there have grown both in number and quality, thus constituting the central pillar of public oversight for good governance at both the central and local levels. I wish all investigative journalists the same energy, determination and perseverance they have shown for the future; I urge young journalists to try this path and promise to publish the fruits of their work in the 2024 edition.

**RAIMAR WAGNER,**

Project Director, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (Germany),  
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## **DOING BUSINESS WITH PUBLIC MONEY:**

# **A GODSON, A DISTRICT PRESIDENT GODFATHER, AND A DISTRICT COUNCILOR AND BUSINESSMAN WHO WINS MILLION-DOLLAR TENDERS IN HIS DISTRICT**

**VICTOR MOȘNEAG, ANATOLIE EȘANU,  
ZIARUL DE GARDĂ, 21 July 2023**

*A sole proprietorship managed by the godfather of the President of Glodeni District won contracts worth more than 23 million lei with state institutions in the north of the country during his mandate. Most of the contracts were won through tenders organized by entities in Glodeni District, including the district council.*

*Ion Cojocari became district president in 2019. Since then, the enterprise of his godfather, businessman Alexandru Gamureac, who is also a district councilor in Glodeni, has suddenly expanded the range of its activities moving from furniture and building materials to repairing buildings and roads, landscaping sports fields and installing street lighting systems at state expense.*



### **COJOCARI AND GAMUREAC: COLLEAGUES IN PLAHOTNIUC'S PDM THEN IN CHICU'S PDCM**

Ion Cojocari (35 years old) was elected president of the Glodeni District Council (DC) in April 2019 and was then re-elected to this position in December 2019 on behalf of the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM). Before becoming district president, he had been a district councilor in Glodeni since 2015 and sales manager at the Glodeni Commercial Office of the North Electric Power Supply SA. Cojocari was a member of the PDM Youth Organization serving as president of the party's Glodeni Youth Organization.

In April 2023, it was announced that the Glodeni district president had left the European Social Democratic Party, the successor of PDM, and together with nine mayors from Glodeni District had joined the Party of Development and Consolidation of Moldova (PDCM) led by former premier Ion Chicu. On 11 June 2023, Cojocari was elected vice-president of the PDCM, responsible for regional development and cross-border cooperation.

Alexandru Gamureac (36 years old) is a district councilor in Glodeni, and like Ion Cojocari was elected from the PDM lists. Until November 2022 he also held a local councilor seat in his home village Fundurii

Vechi also on the PDM side, initially elected in 2015 and re-elected in 2019. However, on 15 November 2022, the Central Election Commission withdrew his mandate as a local councilor after the National Integrity Authority (NIA) found that he had violated the legal regime for conflicts of interest by simultaneously holding the positions of councilor and of specialist in charge of youth and sports issues at Fundurii Vechi Town Hall. He kept his district councilor office.

In August 2015, Alexandru Gamureac became the founder and administrator of the sole proprietorship Gamureac Alexandru. Like Ion Cojocari, Alexandru Gamureac was part of the PDM youth organization. In early 2023 he joined the PDCM and is now the Vice President of the Glodeni Territorial Organization.

### **“OUR DEAR GODPARENTS”**

Ion Cojocari and Alexandru Gamureac are related not only by their political activity in Glodeni DC. A photo published in November 2019 on social media by Ion Cojocari’s wife shows that Alexandru Gamureac is the marital godfather of the president of Glodeni District. “Our dear godparents,” is the message accompanying a photo of the four at the Cojocari family wedding.

Gamureac Alexandru owns a business selling building materials in Fundurii Vechi Village. Public data show that after four years of operation, in 2019 when Ion Cojocari became president of Glodeni District and Alexandru Gamureac became his godfather, the company suddenly expanded its operations and starting in 2020 became a constant presence at public procurements organized in the district and in other localities in the northern part of the country. Until 2019, the company had been engaged in the production and marketing of furniture and building materials only.

Data on the portals of the Public Procurement Agency (PPA) show that before Ion Cojocari became district president, Alexandru Gamureac’s company had only won one contract with the state: to repair the kitchen of the Hîjdieni Middle School for 167,000 lei in 2018. In April 2019, the month in which Ion Cojocari became district president, the enterprise obtained the contract to repair the roof of the wood processing section of the Glodeni Forestry Enterprise for 599,000 lei.



## **CONTRACTS FROM PUBLIC TENDERS WORTH MORE THAN 23 MILLION LEI, MOSTLY IN GLODENI DISTRICT**

Public data also reveal another aspect of the operations of the sole proprietorship. In 2018 the enterprise had only two employees. Slowly, their number increased; in 2021, according to the same public data, the company already had 12 officially employed workers. In the same period, its declared income also increased from 680,000 lei in 2018 with a profit of 112,000 lei to 5.5 million in 2021 and a profit of 648,000 lei. Data for 2022, the most prolific year in the history of Alexandru Gamureac's company, are not yet available.

According to information on the PPA portal, from August 2020 to June 2023 Gamureac Alexandru won no fewer than 24 tenders organized by state institutions in the north of the country worth a total of 23 million lei, about 18 million lei of which were organized by public institutions in Glodeni District.

## **OVER SEVEN MILLION LEI WON FROM CONTRACTS WITH INSTITUTION HEADED BY GODSON WHO IS ALSO CHAIRMAN OF THE TENDER COMMITTEE**

Between 2022 and May 2023, Gamureac Alexandru also won five tenders organized by the Glodeni DC led by Ion Cojocari in the amount of approximately seven million lei. Four of them were for, "... current profiling and sealing work on local roads of district interest" or for the repair of roads connecting villages in Glodeni District.

The largest contract, worth 4.2 million lei, was signed in May 2023 for the third stage of capital repair work on the Ciuciulea-Duşmani-Limbenii Vechi road. The first two stages were won by other companies that had been in the road repair business for several years, but the losing companies either said they had no claims or avoided discussing the winning company. "I participated, lost and went to another one. I have no claims on anyone," said Nicolae Teodorescu, Director of Drumuri Bălţi SA which took part in the tender. "They are competitors, and I don't want to discuss it," he added.

Vladimir Badrajan, Director of Primatex-North, took a similar position. "We often participate in tenders. I lost, I lost again, I moved on

and didn't complicate myself with details. Nowadays, non-specialists in the field can participate wherever they want as this is what the Moldovan legislation provides. We work hard, we invest in people, salaries and certifications to be at the European level, but the legislation allows anyone to participate. I don't know who is affiliated with the winner, nor have I looked into it. I don't even know who the district president is there because we participate all over the country."

Gamureac Alexandru won three other tenders organized by Glodeni DC for the repair or maintenance of roads in the district: "current work of profiling of local roads of district interest (white variant), current work of profiling and filling of local roads of district interest, repair work on Fundurii Noi-Limbenii Vechi-Ustia road, pavement improvement." In all cases, the company's offer was the best from a financial point of view, outbidding other companies specialized in road repair and maintenance.

In another tender worth 599,000 lei organized by Glodeni DC for the "installation of a mini-football field made of artificial turf in the city of Glodeni," Gamureac's company was the only participant.

The tenders organized by Glodeni DC are managed by a tender committee, headed by District President Ion Cojocari himself. Angela Onuțu, a public procurement specialist on the council and one of the committee members, says the district president has never tried to help his godfather's company win a tender. "Ouch. No way. Of course not. Any business operator can participate in procurement procedures if he considers it necessary. For those who submit bids, you can see the hour and the date shown in the program. There is a committee in place that evaluates the bids. But I tell you, I've never heard of anything like that regarding influence. We operate according to the law. Everything is very transparent."

### **OTHER TENDERS IN MUNICIPALITIES RUN BY PARTY COLLEAGUES. "I CAN ONLY BE INFLUENCED BY ONE: GOD."**

In 2022, Alexandru Gamureac's company won 6 out of 16 public tenders organized in Glodeni District for the implementation of projects under the European Village Program. Many of the contracts awarded to the company of the godfather of the district president

were with municipalities run by his party colleagues. In Viișoara in 2021, for example, the mayor was Cătălin Bogdan, a former colleague of Gamureac and Cojocari in the PDM and now in the PDCM. Gamureac Alexandru developed the property adjacent to the locality's central street.

Mayor Bogdan stated that the work was carried out qualitatively and that political relations had no influence. "I'm not interested in that kind of thing. There's nothing between them. He won on a tender, and the tender was done through AIPA. They check us a lot and we have to go through so much that we cannot talk about any relations here. You have done the work and are paid for it, or you haven't done it... Specialists from the agency checked us throughout the process of the work."

In Cobani Village, Ivan Pluta, another party colleague who had also recently moved from the European Social Democratic Party (PSDE) to PDCM was mayor, and Gamureac's company carried out repair works at the kindergarten for 1.8 million lei. Mayor Pluta:

The godfather has nothing to do with the godson. Simply put, if you look at it, we are all godfathers or brothers-in-law. If you think about it, you and I are related. He wasn't influenced by anyone. When a sick person goes to the doctor, does the doctor ask him what party he is from? What has the party got to do with the work and all that? For me, the party is in last place. For me, it's first of all the work, but secondly, it's the people of the village.

Gamureac's company also carried out work in the village in 2020 building the sanitation unit of the middle school.

Alexandru Cojocari, Mayor of Ustia Village where Gamureac's company obtained the right to carry out "construction of the universal sports field near the House of Culture" for about half a million lei denies that anyone influenced him during the tender process. Alexandru Cojocari is also a former PDM-PSDE member who later switched to Chicu's PDCM, and he is also the brother of Ion Cojocari, President of Glodeni District. "He had the lowest price. And it's normal. We didn't have any favouritism. The government, they allocated the money," Mayor Cojocari declared.

Although according to the information on the billboard next to the future sports field, the work was supposed to be completed in

mid-June, there was still work to be done on the site at the beginning of July. Alexandru Cojocari:

The work was supposed to be finished in June... It was supposed to be finished by the 15th. You see, somewhere around 80%... see for yourself. There's only the carpet left to lay and the football bar. Why didn't they make it? I'm thinking there's more work, and they didn't make it by the deadline. That's all. Last year he did repairs to my kindergarten. He did it 100%. So ideal. He won, whatever. Someone else could have won as well.

**Ziarul de Garda (ZdG):** Didn't the fact that he's your brother's godfather influence the decision?

**Alexandru Cojocari:** But what's the godfather got to do with it? That's the godfather when they're sitting at a table. They're relatives with money, honest ones. What does that have to do with it? He is a specialist; it's his job. As for relatives, I can only be influenced by one: God. No one else can influence me.

**THE WINNER IN CUHNEȘTI, EVEN WITHOUT THE BEST BID: THE MAYOR CALLED THERE AND SAID, "HEY, WHAT DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? THIS IS OUR MAN. GET OUT OF THE WAY, AND THAT'S IT."**

Gamureac Alexandru won tenders even when it had not submitted the best financial bid. In Cuhnești in 2022, Gamureac's company won two tenders for a total of more than three million lei. The most valuable of them (2.59 million lei) was for the "installation of efficient street lighting" and was financed from the European Village Project. The Gamureac Alexandru bid was designated the winner even though the price proposed was the highest of all four bids submitted and over one million lei higher than the lowest bid which was from Zepto SRL, a Chișinău-based company specializing in electrical and street lighting work. Although Zepto SRL filed an objection, the company subsequently withdrew it. Dmitrii Rotari, the administrator of Zepto SRL said, "We were then taking part in many tenders often for the European Village, and we didn't have time to challenge as we had to prepare for other tenders. Where we had been chosen winners, we were moving forward, where not, we left it at that; we were not looking into it."

The bids of the other three companies were close (between 0.92 and 1.26 million lei) and much lower than that of Gamureac Alexandru (2.16 million lei) but were rejected on the grounds that “the offer is abnormally low,” according to websites that post information on public procurement. “The mayor’s office asked us to explain why the price was so low. All the firms I think offered explanations. Ours was that this was the price,” said Gheorghii Ciliuța, the administrator of another company participating in the tender which ranked third by price.

The second tender won by Gamureac Alexandru in Cuhnești was worth 685,000 lei and was for the procurement of capital repair works at Kindergarten–Creche No. 1. In this case, the bid submitted by Gamureac ranked third at 570,900 lei, excluding VAT, which was 65,000 lei more than the lowest offer which was submitted by the company Stanila Agro SRL. “You know, I don’t want to speak ill or good, but the mayor called and said, ‘Hey, what don’t you understand? This is our man. Get out of the way, and that’s it.’ How could you dispute it?” asked Vladimir Stanila, administrator of Stanila Agro when we asked him about the Cuhnești tender.

Victor Schin, a local councilor in Cuhnești, claims that neither he nor other colleagues knew the details of those tenders:

As far as the contracts are concerned, we don’t even know the companies, honestly speaking. In council meetings, whenever we ask for information and cost estimates and contracts, absolutely nothing is presented to us. There was a tender, but the company with the highest bid was chosen. Strange is an understatement. We know this: That a mayor, if he wants certain things to work in the village somehow tries to do them as economically as possible so that you can do as many things as possible, but we see that things are done the other way around here.

**MAYOR OF CUHNEȘTI: “THERE HAVE NEVER BEEN REQUESTS, AND I HAVE NEVER PRESSED.”**

Angela Ceban, Mayor of Cuhnești elected in 2019 from the Shor Party, confirmed that Alexandru Gamureac’s company had won the tenders in her village because the other offers were “abnormally low.”

She told us, “The regulation on tenders has a point that says you have to take the real prices, but some were too low. According to our cost estimate, they did not fit our specifications at all.” She said she knew about the relations between the winning firm and the district president but denies that she was influenced:

There have never been any requests, and there has never been any pressure exerted. We knew about it, we know the president is the god-father, but he doesn’t manage it. We have always worked directly with Mr. Gamureac. We have never had any pressure from Mr. President, nor did he say, hey, have a look, or I don’t know what. Never. That’s what we call adherence, not aberration, or whatever they call it.

Mayor Ceban also denies the claim of Stanila Agro SRL that the winner of the tender for the repair of the kindergarten was known from the start. “So, they shouldn’t interfere. I have never received such a complaint or had such a discussion with anyone. How can you say something like that? I’m sorry, but no,” she persisted. She says she had presented the councilors with all the documents requested and that the work on street lighting in the town was nearly finished.

**OTHER TENDERS WON IN MUNICIPALITIES RUN BY MAYORS REPRESENTING OTHER PARTIES: “I DON’T THINK IT WAS RIGGED, IN MY OPINION.”**

Sole proprietorship Gamureac Alexandru has also won tenders organized by municipalities run by other parties. In Dușmani in Glodeni District, for example, the company won the right to repair the canteen of the local middle school for 1.37 million lei. Although public records show that a contract was signed as early as November 2022, the work has not been completed, and at the beginning of July there was not a single worker on the site. “I have seen Mr. Gamureac now and there was no influence either from the president or from Gamureac, absolutely nothing, no influence. Simply the tender. I think it was not rigged, in my opinion. That’s the situation,” said Petru Rusu, Mayor of Dușmani who won the 2019 election from the Shor Party list which has been declared unconstitutional in the meantime.

In Ciuciulea, also in Glodeni District, where Ilie Calistru was elected mayor in 2019 from the ACUM Bloc, Gamureac’s company also won

the right to repair the middle school canteen for about 1.37 million lei. In a conversation with *ZdG*, the mayor of Ciuciulea told us that he did not want to talk on camera but gave us assurances that the tender had not been rigged though there was only one business operator participating: Gamureac Alexandru. The company had previously won another tender in the locality for the repair of a street.

**GAMUREAC: "IF ZIARUL DE GARDĂ SETS UP A CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, IT TOO CAN PARTICIPATE IN ANY TENDER THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY."**

I met Alexandru Gamureac in Glodeni on a small construction site where he was supervising the development of the land adjacent to the construction of sheltered housing, a project implemented by the district council in partnership with the organization Caritas Czech Republic. Gamureac's company had previously obtained the contract to build the housing. In this case, although it is a joint project between the council and the Czech organization with no public money involved, Gamureac Alexandru was appointed to carry out the work without a tender through the public procurement system. At the beginning of 2023, the same enterprise implemented another project in Glodeni, financed from external sources: the construction of a social laundry for the elderly and disabled. The project was funded with support from the European Union and the Soros Foundation Moldova.

Alexandru Gamureac claims that neither these projects financed from external sources nor the public tenders, including those organized by the Glodeni District Council, were obtained with the help or influence of his godson:

The company managed by me personally has all the necessary documents to participate in procurements that are made within the district and even outside the district. I can inform you that we are not only active in Glodeni District. If we talk about roads, you can see in 2022 that we won tenders in Șoldănești, we also won in Sîngerei District and in Glodeni District. For me personally and for the company I manage, it is easier [to participate in Glodeni].... this road, the travel, it is easier to work in our district. These trips cost money, as you can imagine.

He claims it was a coincidence that his company ended up getting contracts with the state, including the Glodeni District Council, precisely during the period when his godson became district president. “Regardless of the fact that he is my godson, he has no advantage whatsoever. You know that all tenders are public now, so if *Ziarul de Gardă* sets up a construction company, it too can participate in any tender throughout the country. And he can’t in any way influence, whether we’re talking about Mr. Cojocari or someone else, the course of the tender. We don’t know who will participate,” he stated.

**“I TELL YOU, IT’S EVEN HARDER IN SITUATIONS LIKE THIS, KNOWING THAT EVERYONE IS AFTER US, INCLUDING ZIARUL DE GARDĂ”**

Alexandru Gamureac says it was to be expected that there would be questions about his participation in tenders:

I was expecting, like last year and in other years, that there would be questions like this, but you know, in this country we still have these godparent-godchild relations, and I don’t think I have to run away from the district because Mr. Cojocari is president or Mr. Cojocari has to leave his position because I have a construction company. Do you understand? We met five or six years ago. At one time, as you say, I only made furniture and windows, and I also run shops selling construction materials. Then I tried to develop the business. I saw that there was no road repair equipment in our district, so I made investments, took loans and now we are trying to work, to make, to provide road repair services.

I tell you for sure, no matter where Mr. Cojocari is, we are going forward with company development. We came from abroad, we brought money into the country, we have made investments. I mean, nobody can stop me. I know that now it’s the elections and they are starting to manipulate and pressure us, but that’s the situation. We’re used to it. As godfather of the district president, I feel pressure when the work is being carried out. We know that we are going to be targeted, both me and the president and other colleagues. We always strive to do our best. We have never gone for the option to dodge, to not do the work. There are many discussions on this issue, but we always strive to be at a proper level.



He claims that even the tenders won in villages where the mayors are his party colleagues had allegedly been conducted according to the law. “I’m telling you that it’s even harder in such situations, knowing that everyone is after us, including Ziarul de Gardă,” Gamureac argued. He admitted that his company also had direct contracts signed with the district council without a public tender. Alexandru Gamureac:

Direct ones, there was something, very little there. There were some additional works, where we had won the tender for 6-7-8 hundred thousand lei. In the course of the work, it was found that additional work was needed... and you realize that no other company will come from Bălți to bring heavy machinery, for example, as it was in a locality, to clear a piece of roadside of trees. But the amounts are small there.

**COJOCARI: “THE WHOLE SITUATION WITH MR. GAMUREAC IS NOT A POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST.”**

Ion Cojocari, President of Glodeni District, also claims that he had not helped his godfather to win any tenders. Cojocari specified that when his company won the first tender organized by the council, taking into account the fact that Alexandru Gamureac was also a district councilor, his colleagues turned to the NIA to comment on the situation.

The NIA said that if it was a public tender and when he participated in the elections he did not know about it or did not have an interest in participating when the allocation took place, because the allocation of money is usually done through a Glodeni DC meeting, we have an answer. That’s also when I phoned and asked, ‘Hey, do I have to write? Here, look, we have a non-kinship relationship.’ I’m a lawyer, I have a law degree, a master’s degree in criminal sciences, criminology, a master’s degree in public administration, I know the law very well, and they said, ‘This is Christian stuff, in other words, we can’t examine it.’ The NIA can’t express itself; they said that it’s useless, that it’s not subject to their examination, it doesn’t examine godfather-godson situations and so on. Journalists and others deal with such matters. That’s what they said.

**ZdG:** Do you have an answer?

**Ion Cojocari:** No, we don’t. They said, “We can’t give you an

answer,” but for the most part, they said it doesn’t fall under their jurisdiction, rather that it’s in the Civil Code, in the Family Code, what a relative means and so on.”

Ion Cojocari admits that as Chairman of the Tender Committee, he did not recuse himself when tenders were organized with the participation of his godfather’s company.

I abstained in the first [tender] if I am not mistaken, and did not sign the declaration ... I don’t remember. But the rules clearly state that you have to give reasons why a member of the committee does not sign. And you follow the rules. The rules also say, again, relatives up to and including the third degree. All this stuff, the whole situation with Mr. Gamureac does not fall under a potential conflict of interest. Moreover, the committee is made up of several members and, after all, my vote is not decisive. I understand what you are referring to, that if I am the chairman... We have always selected the lowest price if it was in line with the documentation and there were no grounds for dispute.

**“I’VE NEVER EVEN TRIED TO FAVOUR HIM OR SPEAK WITH ANYONE ABOUT IT.”**

The president of the district said that he had previously had a discussion with Alexandru Gamureac on the subject of tenders:

He said, “You see, I’m here in the district, and I can’t take all my wealth and go somewhere else because you’re district president.” He is one of the young people who stayed here in the district, has developed the business, you will see if you talk to him, he has developed, has credits. I know this stuff; I can’t say I don’t know about his work. But I want to tell you that considering that there were suspicions, they have always been under the eyes of the competent bodies about this situation. I have never even tried to favour him or to speak with anyone about him.

The president also dismissed the fact that political connections helped his godfather win tenders in villages where the mayors were their party colleagues. “Half of the mayors in Glodeni District are part of our team. I mean, it makes sense, and it’s possible that he has work. If he has participated in a tender... he cannot help participating in a tender when the legislation allows him to, even from the district council,

but even more so the municipality just because the district president has a relationship that is Christian as we call it.” Cojocari contended.

**ZdG:** Didn't you talk to them?

**Ion Cojocari:** With the mayors? Nooo, I didn't.

**ZdG:** Not even with Ustia?

**Ion Cojocari:** Not even with Ustia.

**ZdG:** Where your brother is?

**Ion Cojocari:** Yes, my brother is there, but it was the lowest price there. I understand that there might have been doubts if there had been others, but if it's the lowest price, no. Well, I can't say that I didn't talk about the European Village project with my brother, but to say 'hey, select that person,' I didn't have discussions on that topic.

The district president also admitted that in addition to public tenders, the council also signed direct contracts with Alexandru Gamureac's company. "If I'm not mistaken, there's one on the basis of a... I think it's 100 and something – an emergency in Cajba Village on a road, on a bridge." He then recalled that there was another contract "for about 60,000 for snow removal," but specified that other companies were contracted to do similar work then.

**EXPERT: "LEGALLY, IT'S NOT A CONFLICT OF INTEREST, BUT MORALLY IT IS."**

The category of close persons as defined by the law on the declaration of wealth and personal interests does not include godparents or godchildren, therefore making decisions regarding them cannot be qualified as a conflict of interest according to the legislation in force. However, Lilia Zaharia, Executive Director of Transparency International Moldova, believes that, "The elected representatives of the people should regulate this issue because we are a country with the habit of having 99 godparents. Legally it is not a conflict of interest, but morally it is," was her opinion.

Director Zaharia said that corruption could be involved and that law enforcement bodies should check how this company won tenders when the godson of its owner was the district president:

Here I also see a problem with the members of the working group because in a small town they know each other. And if the president

does not have the integrity to declare this a conflict of interest, then the members of the working group should do that, notifying either the National Integrity Authority or the other bidders and business operators so the tenders can be challenged with the National Agency for Settlement of Disputes, on the grounds that there is a problem. There is a relationship, it is not kinship, but it is a relationship by affiliation with the president and the tender winner. The strange thing is that the Public Procurement Agency did not see that a company that previously had operations in one specialty quickly, suddenly changed its operations to another and took all the contracts in that locality.

## **FATE OF VALUE SHARES**

# **THIRTY YEARS AFTER KOLKHOZ DEMISE: THE CASE OF BARABOI, DONDUȘENI**

**ION PREAȘCĂ,**

**MOLD-STREET.COM, 22 September 2023**

*In the 30 years since the start of agrarian reform in the Republic of Moldova, it has still not been completed; a large number of former members of the Soviet kolkhoz have not yet obtained their value shares (buildings, transport units, cattle) or their agricultural land shares from the former collective farms. In Baraboi in Dondușeni District, a number of locals consider themselves dispossessed after several recent court decisions in which several warehouses were declared to be the property of individuals instead of being shared.*



In many localities, the property of former collective farms was simply stolen, a fact mentioned as early as 1995 in a speech in Parliament by the country's first President Mircea Snegur. Most of that property, however, was shared among local leaders. There are still localities where the property has been preserved, but the problem is that former members of collective farms may not get possession of it.

In recent years, this property has become the subject of legal disputes and raider attacks generating conflicts between locals and farmland owners. In the village of Baraboi in Dondușeni District, a new dispute over the possession of some buildings of former *kolkhoz* Maiak broke out in 2021 after Edineț District Court in Dondușeni issued a decision in which various people – allegedly from the entourage of then current Mayor Leonid Cotorcea – overnight became owners of warehouses and other buildings.

### **SCHEME FOR DISPOSSESSION BY COURT JUDGMENT**

The scheme was simple. A person entitled to a value share would go to court asking for confirmation of the validity of an alleged sale and purchase agreement signed by some of the value shareholders and for their ownership status to be recognized. For example, on 25

May 2021, Judge Lucia Danilișin of Edinet District Court accepted the request of Noris Cebotari to examine a case in his absence and in the absence of the defendants, “...to allocate grain warehouse inventory no. 6 and cadastral no. 3411105139.02 with an estimated value of 56,700 lei, in kind, to a group of 23 co-owners as follows: \*\*\*\*\* 2111 lei (3.11%) so they could divest their shares in the remaining common property in favour of the remaining co-owners.”

The court also declared valid the sale and purchase contracts for the grain warehouse concluded between Noris Cebotari and the group of co-owners in Baraboi and recognized him as the owner of that building.

On 2 June 2021, just one week later, Judge Lilia Turcan in the same court accepted Sergiu Căărăuș’ request to examine, in the absence of 14 defendants, the “in kind” award of grain warehouse no. 4, cadastral number 3411204007.02 in Baraboi estimated at 56,700 lei. Edineț District Court confirmed the sale and purchase contracts and recognized Sergiu Căărăuș as the owner of the property.

On the same day, the same judge in another case decided that grain warehouse no. 9 was the property of Iurie Cotorcea.

On 24 June 2021, Edinet District Court (Judge Tatiana Sobolschi) issued a decision based on Ion Onea’s request to confirm ownership of building no. 14 fodder section appraised at 18,200 lei which had seven co-owners. She also recognized the sale and purchase contracts with four co-owners and declared Ion Onea the owner of the building.

## **MAYOR ACCUSED OF BEING THE BENEFICIARY**

The new owners soon appeared before the property manager – Agro SZM SRL (formerly AGT Baraboi) – to take actual possession. Only then did Baraboi residents find out that they were no longer co-owners of those properties. As a result, several people wanted to go to court to overturn the decisions but found that the legal deadline had already expired. This was the case for the decision of 25 May 2021 issued by Judge Lucia Danilișin. Data from land registers show that Noris Cebotari registered his ownership of the warehouse on 25 June 2021, exactly one month after the court decision, and was still the owner of the property though a complaint filed to declare the act null and void is mentioned. Six people who lost their shares in grain

warehouse no. 6 went to court for a review of the judgment claiming that their property rights and right to a fair trial had been violated.

In a review order, another group of co-owners also challenged the decision of 2 June 2021 issued at the request of Ion Onea. In this case they directly accused Baraboi Mayor Leonid Cotorcea of being behind the Donduşeni District Court decisions and “...the ultimate beneficiary of those illegalities. Through the illegal actions of Leonid Cotorcea, Mayor of Baraboi Commune, with the involvement of the courts, we the undersigned as well as other holders of value shares have been illegally dispossessed of the real estate [building No. 14],” the petition states.

Collective complaints were also filed with the Police Inspectorate and the Donduşeni Prosecutor’s Office regarding these actions which were considered to be illegal embezzlements of common property. The police, however, did not find “any violations in the actions of the authors” and did not initiate criminal proceedings, stating that the resolution of the problem was the responsibility of the court. In the end, however, all court decisions transferring ownership of various real estate properties have been quashed, and the cases will be retried.

Thus, the dispute over ownership of *kolkhoz* warehouses and other assets continues. Mayor Leonid Cotorcea denies any involvement: “One must prove that I am [involved]. One may just say anything.”

## **NO AMICABLE SETTLEMENT CAN BE REACHED**

“When I became mayor in 2019, I organized a meeting with all the business operators, including AGRO SZM which illegally owns all our property without any documentation. I asked them to share with each business operator so that everyone would have a place to store their bread grain, but they didn’t accept that proposition,” Cotorcea contended.

According to him, the committee for the evaluation of goods and value shares created earlier this year in the municipality to identify all goods and to find a solution to the problem was sabotaged and could not decide anything. He also blames Andrei Turcan, Mayor of Baraboi from 2003 to 2019 for the current situation because he did not solve the problem in a timely fashion.



Andrei Turcan, currently a local councilor, says that he also tried to find an amicable solution and to reach “a sharing of the estate by agreement... in a humane manner,” as had been done in other localities but was not successful because Mayor Cotorcea allegedly did not accept arbitration; the issue of reconciliation was not even being raised now. “You have to go by the law, however good or bad it is, but you have to go by the law... otherwise all the people feel offended,” Turcan stated. “Now, people want to get fairness and at least get some money for their value shares,” he added.

Alexandru Bujnița, Baraboi Mayor’s Office Secretary, says that back in 2015 the local authorities tried to find a solution to clarify and issue property deeds for the value shares, but everything remained unresolved because of the legislation at the time which did not allow such a procedure at the local level.

## **CENTRAL AUTHORITIES’ SOLUTION TO VALUE SHARE ISSUE**

In order to solve problems related to the status of former *kolkhoz* assets, the Land Relations and Cadastre Agency (ARFC) in 2022 suggested amending Law No. 523 on Property of Administrative-Territorial Units. They suggested supplementing the law with provisions for three categories of property that are not in public registers: abandoned property, property in the possession of administrative-territorial units, and property in the possession of other persons. “With land reform..., the technical and material base of the former collective agricultural farms has been transferred into private ownership; however, to date in some localities, some real estate has not been entered into public registers and is not tracked either through the owners of the shares or with local public administration authorities. Because it is not registered in the established manner, and the rights and obligations between the parties have not been determined, this for the most part has resulted in the total or partial destruction of the real estate,” argued Ștefan Crigan, Deputy Director General of ARFC on the need to amend the legislation in the Parliament.

Officially, it is not known how much property from former collective farms still exists. In the summer of 2022, the Congress of Local

Authorities (CALM) mentioned that, “Approximately 2,207 real estate assets are unregistered and unvalued. Nearly 2,000 of these are buildings (agricultural, housing, kindergartens, schools, other administrative buildings); about 250 are land plots; and 29 are dams, water pumping stations, water features, artesian wells.”

CALM expert Alexandru Morcov argued at the time that other legislation should be amended as well so that vacant succession would pass to the local public administration. “This is important because in the meantime many people have died, inheritances have not been determined, and thus many assets cannot be properly capitalized, and it also spoils the appearance of those localities,” Morcov said. In November 2022, the government adopted the Regulations on Stock-Taking of Assets Transferred or To Be Transferred on Account of Value Shares from Former Agricultural Enterprise Property.

## **MAYOR'S OFFICE COMMITTEE**

Subsequently, after the government decision and the above regulations came out in early 2023, Mayor Cotorcea decided to create the Committee for the Stock-Taking of Value Shares, invoking the provisions of that document. Initially, there were four members on the committee led by Mayor Cotorcea, then Andrei Turcan was included. The councilor claims he was invited to be a member, but he set conditions. “We work together, but on one condition. Get your people who have done all this stuff together, withdraw all the claims from the court and we start from scratch. He didn't invite me ... He emailed me an invitation,” the town councilor said.

At the same time, Turcan argued that the solution proposed by the authorities in the regulations would not be feasible as it concerned real estate and buildings. “What should we do with the other part of the value share, the agricultural machinery, even if it is obsolete?” the councilor wondered. “And then, who will appraise them? Someone has to pay. It's the same with land, and the municipalities don't have the money,” Turcan added.

CALM expert Alexandru Morcov says the point of this document is that people have had at least 30 years to realize their rights and to register their property in the public registers but have not done so;

nevertheless, the problem still needs to be resolved. This real estate is deteriorating and is not part of the economy. “It was done so that the local authorities could do a stock-taking of the assets that are in their jurisdictions, then the mayor’s office could publish the information and people would have the right to claim their property rights for one year. If not claimed in one year, the asset is to be registered as the property of the local public authority, but this does not deprive them of the right to claim a share of ownership in court,” Morcov said.

### **MAYOR: IT’S EASIER TO GO TO COURT**

Elected in autumn 2019 representing the Socialists Party, Mayor Cotorcea and his family are among the largest owners of farmland (several hundred shares of land) in the locality. Most of the sale and purchase contracts for the land he owns have been legalized through court decisions and not through a notary as required by law. He says it was all legal. “That’s how everyone did it, and that’s how I did it. And I didn’t cheat anyone, I didn’t steal from anyone, and I have no complaints from anyone. It’s easier to go to court,” Cotorcea explained and added that no one has challenged the court decisions.

The process of legalizing agricultural land ownership through the courts is a growing phenomenon judging by the number of decisions issued by courts over the years. According to lawyers, this form of legalization is an exceptional measure, carried out only if the other party shirks certain commitments. The legality of such judgments is therefore questionable to say the least.

Cotorcea is the sole founder and beneficial owner of Agro-Eugen SRL in Baraboi, registered in 2012 as an agricultural concern. His company is one of the main owners of farmland in the locality. In 2021, for example, he reported revenue of 24.38 million lei and a profit of 3.98 million lei. Previously, Cotorcea was the administrator and 100% owner of the company Andrieș-Cotorcea IC in the locality; it was liquidated in 2020.

### **SANCTIONED BY THE NATIONAL INTEGRITY AUTHORITY**

The Mayor of Baraboi is currently in a dispute with the National Integrity Authority (NIA) which on 11 November 2020 issued

Fact-finding Act No.262/17, according to which “Leonid Cotorcea has violated the legal regime of conflicts of interest manifested by holding/exercising simultaneously the capacity of founder and manager of a sole proprietorship and the office of Mayor of Baraboi Commune.”

NIA then decided to disqualify Leonid Cotorcea from holding a public office or an office of public dignity, including the office of mayor, for a period of three years. That decision has not, however, been executed, as the mayor has challenged it in court, and the case is still pending.

On 11 July 2023, NIA issued another fact-finding act according to which “Leonid Cotorcea, acting as Mayor of the Village of Baraboi, Donduşeni, violated the legal regime of conflicts of interest manifested by his failure to declare a conflict of interest in the established manner and timeframe and his failure to resolve it properly, which occurred when signing the act of finding the damage caused to agricultural crops by natural disasters no.2 of 18 Aug 2020.”

NIA again decided to disqualify Leonid Cotorcea from holding a public office or a position of public dignity including the office of mayor but with the exception of other elective offices for a period of three years. Asked about these sanctions, the mayor said he had challenged them and would not run for mayor again.

# **ROAD REPAIR IN BUDA, CĂLĂRAȘI:**

## **THE KINDERGARTEN ROAD IS CRACKING AND CRUMBLING WHILE THE MAYOR'S AND COUNCILOR'S ARE THICK AND DURABLE**

**ANATOLIE EȘANU, VICTOR MOȘNEAG,  
ZIARUL DE GARDĂ, 2 November 2023**

*Repairing the road to the kindergarten in Buda has been a campaign promise in the village in recent years. In 2023, after a native of Buda became the Acting President of Călărași District, funding was found from the district council; however, the way the repair work was carried out did not match politicians' promises and people's expectations. Shortly after the work was completed, cracks began to appear on the road. The thin layer of concrete poured on top of gravel is crumbling in some spots causing people to complain and ask the authorities to intervene. At the time that the kindergarten road was repaired, concrete was also poured in the village on another road which passes by a local councilor's house. The difference between the two roads is visible, even to the councilor himself who inspected the two roads with Ziarul de Gardă (ZdG) reporters. Last year, the road by the mayor's house in the village was also repaired, and its quality is noticeably better than that of the kindergarten road.*



On 7 March 2023, Buda Communal Council (CC) in Călărași District issued a decision on the repair of a 700-square-meter road that passes by the local kindergarten and almost reaches the edge of the village. The local authorities indicated in the decision that the cost of the work would be 300,000 lei. The repair of this road had been eagerly awaited by locals for years and promised in every election campaign.

### **CĂLĂRAȘI DISTRICT COUNCIL ALLOCATES 300,000 LEI BUT SETS CONDITIONS**

The dream of the people who live on this street and the parents who take their children to kindergarten to walk on a good road came true after funding was found: in March in a decision of Călărași District Council (DC), 300,000 lei were allocated to Buda municipality as a “contribution to the repair of a road section.”

The decision was made shortly after Vasile Timofte became Acting District President. He was born in Buda where he owns a house he inherited from his parents. The house is currently uninhabited and is a few dozen metres away from the end of the road that was to be repaired. The DC allocated the money but also set some conditions.

“The acting president and the vice-president of the district, Mr. Vasile Timofte, will finance the costs approved in Annex No. 12 for the municipalities of Țibirica and Buda according to the supporting documents submitted in the amount of the difference between the winning bid following public procurement and the contribution assumed by the applicant municipality within the amount approved,” reads the decision of Călărași DC of 30 March 2023 on amending the district budget for 2023.

Shortly afterwards, on 27 April Buda CC amended the budget for 2023 and showed the 300,000 lei it was to receive from the district for the repair of the road to the kindergarten in the income section. The plans on paper did not, however, match the facts.

### **“WHOEVER PASSES BY LAUGHS AT THIS ROAD.”**

In August, the road to the kindergarten was repaired; however, the process—especially the result—left virtually everyone living on that street unhappy. Two months after it was finished, the road is full of cracks, and the layer of concrete is not even 2 centimetres thick in some spots and can be removed by hand. The road was smoothed by the locals with shovels but remains bumpy; those who pass by daily are sure that the first heavy rain will wash away the concrete. A local woman who asked us not to reveal her identity for fear of being persecuted by the local authorities told us the following:

Is this a road? They’ve put in god-knows-what; it’s thin. They didn’t lay it thick enough. This road was planned to be made last year, but they made another one by the gate, and now they’ve already made this one. We thought they’d make a good, straight, sound road. This is a central road. In autumn and spring, carts, cars, motorbikes, everyone uses it to reach the forest for firewood, or the vineyards... Nobody is happy with this road. Whoever passes by laughs at it. They called us together and told us that there should be a man from each household there at 8 AM. People came out at 8 AM and stood under the fence until 1 PM when the concrete truck finally came. The problem was that there was another road repair in the new village [in front of the councilor’s house] and they poured the concrete there.

## TEARING CRACKS, NOT TO MENTION THE UNEVENNESS...

Cristina Șpac is another resident of the street “repaired” in August. At the end of October, together with other villagers, she initiated a petition that was subsequently signed by several locals and submitted it to Călărași DC. The people are asking the council, the District Prosecutor’s Office and the Police Inspectorate to form a commission to check the quality of the road to the kindergarten. “We are outraged by the appearance of this road made of concrete,” the petition’s signatories say.

“I personally went to Călărași, and I was clearly told that the mayor had not complied with anything that had been asked of her regarding that road. There is no stone foundation which should be 10 cm, the concrete, too, in some places is 4–5 cm, in other places not even that much. Tearing cracks, not to mention the unevenness... The reinforcement is completely missing,” Ms Șpac alleged.

No specialized company was hired to pour the road. The locals say only the gravel was laid with the help of a grader but they were the ones to pour and level the concrete. “Those who had men at home didn’t pay, but those who didn’t have anyone paid 300–400 lei each. What were we supposed to do? We paid the men who did the work,” a woman explained.

“We are grateful for walking on concrete, but it would be good for specialists to come and see, maybe we don’t know. We later understood that the concrete had been taken elsewhere, to the new village. There [was gravel] laid there, and they made [a road] of concrete. That day when we were waiting for the trucks to come to us, they went there,” said Eudochia Păun, a teacher at the village primary school, also a resident on that street.

## ROAD TO COUNCILOR’S HOUSE AND ROAD TO MAYOR’S HOUSE

ZdG found out that precisely when the road leading to the kindergarten was repaired, another concrete road located in the “new village” as the locals call it, was poured. That road runs past the house of local councilor Mihail Timofte, a party colleague of the mayor. The difference in quality between the two roads is visible. The concrete layer on the road by the councilor’s house is several times thicker than that on the road to the kindergarten.



The dissatisfaction of the villagers is also fueled by the fact that Buda municipality repaired another concrete road in the village in 2022 that passes right by the house of Mayor Tatiana Timofte. This road looks quite different from the road to the kindergarten. The difference in thickness and quality can be seen with the naked eye, especially at the junction of the two roads.

“I don’t care that they made three more roads that day. They should have made this one qualitatively too, and the money that is allocated for a road should be invested in it, not wasted and scattered,” Cristina Șpac noted.

“The day before, when the meeting with the mayor was held, some women asked, “Will it be like yours [new road] over there?” “Yes, it will,” was the reply. It didn’t turn out like that and that’s why people got angry. At least a little thicker would be better. I’m not a road specialist, but the men say everything goes downhill at the first heavy rain and the first frost,” teacher Eudochia Păun added.

**MAYOR’S EXPLANATION: “I DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT THE PROBLEM IS.”**

To understand why there are noticeable differences in the quality of the three roads in the village, we went to the mayor’s office but did not find Tatiana Timofte there. She is running for another term so has been relieved of her duties during the election campaign. Contacted by phone, Tatiana Timofte avoided meeting us. We returned to Buda after a week and tried to meet with the mayor again, but she told us she was not in the village.

In the absence of the mayor, we tried to get details about the road repairs from Council Secretary Natalia Coda who was Acting Mayor and from the Mayor’s Office Accountant Lilia Poiană. During the course of our conversation, those two officials called Tatiana Timofte several times to clarify answers to our questions. “Why are you coming to see me? I have the money given by the DC and the road fund. I put all the money into roads,” the mayor said assuring us that she had “absolutely everything, the contract and the invoice.”

We then asked Mayor Timofte why the two roads made on the same day were of different qualities. Timofte justified herself:

Because I put people to work here as well as there. We made it with our own workforce. And all the roads in the village have been made with the people's own labor. Why has it turned out like this? Because when we brought in the concrete in a 40-ton lorry, the road was narrow and it was very difficult to pour it there. But if people don't understand, we can't do anything. We laid down wooden forms, everything that was needed. The thickness corresponds, people simply could not pull up the three-meter rack. I can send you a photo of how the people worked. I don't understand what the problem is. The road is just like that one [that passes by the gate of her house].

Municipality staff were unable to provide us with a document justifying the execution of the repair work on the road that passes by the councilor's house. In a subsequent discussion, the mayor referred to a CC decision from last year. "We have continued that road portion this year. The money is from the road fund. The concrete for the road to the councilor's house is still not paid for. The accountant can confirm," the mayor informed us.

"Yes, of course," the accountant said without even checking. She specified that the 300,000 lei from Călărași DC allocated in March had already entered the mayor's office accounts but that the concrete had not yet been paid for.

The accountant showed us two contracts for the procurement of concrete from two different companies, totaling almost 300,000 lei. Although she did not show us the contract, she claims that additional concrete worth 120,000 lei had been purchased for the road running by the councilor's house which had not yet been paid for either. With reference to that road, the mayor said that the money had not even been allocated.

### **COUNCILOR: "KONECHNO THERE IS A DIFFERENCE."**

In an attempt to convince us that all three roads are of a similar quality, the mayor appointed Councilor Mihail Timofte to accompany us to the two roads repaired in August. Upon arrival at the road leading to the kindergarten, the councilor initially tried to convince us that it was of good quality.

Later, seeing how pieces of the road could easily be broken off by hand, he blamed it all on the fact that the roadbed is narrow so the

workers couldn't lay down the forms. "Road edges are narrow but the middle is thick. The road is wide by my house and cars had space enough to turn and it was possible to lay down the wooden forms. Of course, there is no problem. *Konechno* [surely] there is a difference," the councilor finally admitted.

He was, however, confident that the road to the kindergarten would last for years to come. He also blamed the locals because, "people did not come out to fix it. The mayor and her husband came out to pour concrete here... If a company had come, they wouldn't have made even 100 metres of road," the councilor argued.

Buda resident Cristina Șpac:

Do they really blame the people? For this road [to the kindergarten], more than 200,000 lei had been allocated from the municipality and 300,000 lei from Călărași DC. However, I understand that the DC will not give this money because the standards have not been met. Of this amount of over 500,000 lei, about 60,000 were to be allocated to a construction company to come and work. I'm not obliged to do it... Yes, as a citizen of the village I can come and help—one shouldn't stand and watch—but it was not the responsibility of the villagers to come with shovels, rakes.

Asked under which act it was decided to repair the road by his house, Councilor Mihail Timofte referred to the fact that "it was a council decision."

We went back to the mayor's office to seek again the decision referred to by both the councilor and the mayor on the road repair work by the councilor's house. The acting mayor showed us a decision of Buda CC **in 2021** which stipulated that a **30-metre** section of the road near Councilor Timofte's house was to be repaired that year. "That's all I could find," the mayor's office employee explained. The law, however, states that decisions can be executed only in the year they were adopted.

## **CONCRETE BOUGHT FROM TWO RELATED FIRMS WITHOUT TENDERING**

The names of two apparently different companies appear in the two contracts for the procurement of concrete that Buda municipality showed us: Beton Service SRL, with a legal address in Grătiești, Chișinău, and Bogaterra Grup SRL with a legal address in the village of Molovata,

Dubăsari. The former delivered 70 cubic metres of concrete to Buda Municipality at a total cost of 154,000 lei while the latter delivered 66.25 cubic metres of concrete at a cost of 145,750 lei for a **grand total of 299,750 lei**. *ZdG* found that the two companies were related and that the concrete, although delivered by two separate companies according to the documents, had been manufactured in the same place, i.e., in Grătiești at a concrete production unit belonging to Beton Service SRL.

The link between Beton Service and Bogaterra Grup was confirmed by the representatives of the two companies themselves. They say that they supplied concrete to Buda municipality and have not yet received their money. According to them, in August they concluded only one contract with Buda municipality and they know nothing about the third contract worth 120,000 lei to which Mayor Tatiana Timofte referred. Asked how his company ended up delivering concrete to Buda municipality when no procurement notice had been published, Eugen Balan, director and founder of Bogaterra Grup, replied that he was not in charge of looking after contracts, that it was another staff member's job; however, she was not in the country at the time of the discussion. Representatives of Buda Mayor's Office told us that they had used the two firms because they had worked with them before and knew them.

**ACTING PRESIDENT OF CĂLĂRAȘI DC WHEN MONEY WAS ALLOCATED: "I ABSOLUTELY DO NOT LIKE THE QUALITY. I'M KIND OF ASHAMED."**

To find out the opinion of Călărași DC representatives about the repair of the road for which they had allocated 300,000 lei, we talked to Acting District President Zinaida Turcanu. After contacting Head of Finance Department Iurie Bobeica in our presence, she said that Călărași had **not** transferred the 300,000 lei to Buda municipality because the latter had not submitted any supporting documents. Her claims were confirmed by Alexandru Marian, Head of the Construction Department of Călărași DC.

Vasile Timofte, Acting President of Călărași District when the 300,000 lei were allocated, says he has seen how the road looks:

Of course, I have seen how the road was repaired. The attitude was like, I don't even know what to call it. It was a careless attitude on the part of the mayor and the public authorities. Someone was saying that

it [the road] led to my parents' house. And I said, then, on the contrary, it had to be good quality if it was about my status. But this attitude...

I agree [that the road is not good quality]; I don't even know how to explain it. ... As I understand it, the mayor herself started spreading concrete there and was saying, 'Move on, move on.' The quality doesn't appeal to me, absolutely. I'm kind of ashamed. I met with the mayor and I asked, who does it like that? She started to explain that she didn't have anyone to do it. I said, well, you had someone to talk to. I could have sent the road services from Călărași and they would have advised and helped you.

Vasile Timofte also claimed that although the money was allocated shortly after he had taken over as head of the DC and the road to be repaired passes by his house, he did not influence the allocation process, and as the amount has not been transferred, the financing of the repair of the kindergarten road remains uncertain.

The money has not been transferred because the construction service came to me and said that she [the mayor] had to come and ask for it, that she had to prepare the work receipt act. The service was waiting for her to come. Money has not been allocated only to Buda; there is also Vălcineț, Țibirica and others. The DC policy was that those who had projects and programs and wanted to do something but didn't have enough money, we could be partners in solving their problems.

Tatiana Timofte became Mayor of Buda in 2015 on the list of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) when she won the election after the second round. In 2019, she won her second term also as a PSRM candidate. In July 2023, Timofte joined the Renaissance Party led by Serghei Mișin, a former presidential adviser when Igor Dodon was president. The announcement of party affiliation was made by former Socialist MP Vasile Bolea. The former president of Călărași district Ștefan Bolea joined the Renaissance Party together with Mayor Tatiana Timofte.

**THEY WANTED TO SAVE  
FIVE PENNIES AND INSTEAD  
SPENT MILLIONS**

**HOW THE PRICE OF A “CHEAP”  
CONSTRUCTION PROJECT  
FOR DURLEȘTI HIGH SCHOOL  
INCREASED**

**VICTORIA BORODIN,**  
**ZIARUL DE GARDĂ, 23 November 2023**

*In the end, the plans for constructing an annex to Hyperion Academic High School in Durlești in 2021 on a tight budget increased the initial contract amount by almost two million lei and the commissioning deadline by almost one year. This is because dozens of problems were identified during construction that added 26 riders for additional work to the contract. The original plans lacked a fire alarm system, communication networks, and interior water and sewage networks while the foundation for the corridor that was to connect the main building to the annex was to be dug over the heating network. The director of the design firm admits that the plans were incomplete but claims that this is what the client asked for based on the available budget.*



## ARCHITECT CONTRACTED WITHOUT A TENDER

At the end of 2021, Durlești Town Hall initiated the construction of an annex for Hyperion Academic High School. According to the design, the three-storey building would have six classrooms, a new gymnasium with changing rooms, bathrooms on each floor, two laboratories, and a corridor linking it to the main school building.

The construction work was commissioned by Durlești Town Hall at the request of the education facility. In February 2020, Hyperion Headmistress Elena Pasat contracted the company Arhicreativ SRL to design the building without a competition. Lubovi Popa, lawyer for Durlești Town Hall, is a godmother of the child of the company's founder and administrator Andrei Rotaru.

The contract between Hyperion and Arhicreativ SRL was signed on 12 February 2020 after Mayor of Chișinău Ion Ceban and then Mayor of Durlești Eleonora Saran visited the high school on 3 February 2020 at which time Ceban promised that the city administration would allocate 7.5 million lei for the start of construction on the condition that Durlești Town Hall also contributed two or three million lei.

## **HIGH SCHOOL HEADMISTRESS: “WHERE ELSE WOULD I GO IF THE DESIGN HAD ALREADY BEEN MADE?”**

Headmistress Pasat claimed that she contracted directly with Arhicreativ SRL because the contract was of low value and because she had previously collaborated with the firm’s director.

We needed the extension because the number of pupils was increasing every year so we asked Mayor Ion Ceban to support us in the construction of the annex. He said, ‘Yeah, okay. You need a cost estimate, a project design, and we will bring the matter before Chişinău City Council.’ We urgently needed to have that design. Where else do you think I should have gone knowing that someone had already actually made a draft design? I called Mr. Andrei [Rotaru] and asked him if he could make a cost estimate for the draft design he had previously made. He said, ‘Yes, let’s make a contract.’ The contract was for 134,000 lei. This amount enabled us to conclude the contract without a tender.

## **FROM GYM TO EDUCATION BUILDING**

The draft the headmistress was talking about was done in 2017 and involved designing a gym, not an education building; that contract was worth 82,670 lei and was signed not with Arhicreativ SRL but with Crudo Partners SRL. The two firms had worked together for several years in a partnership preparing plans for municipalities and education facilities to participate in cross-border projects. With documents prepared by the two firms, in 2017 Hyperion in Dureşti participated in a cross-border project bid with Mihai Eminescu Academic High School in Bârlad, Romania but did not win the project.

Headmistress Pasat claimed that the idea of participating in the project came from the director and co-founder (70%) of Crudo Partners SRL Ion Crudu, former mayor of the Village of Vărzăreşti, Nisporeni District from 2011 to 2015 and State Secretary at the Ministry of Environment in the Chiril Gaburici Government. “Mr. Crudu came to me. They both came so dressed up that I thought some ministers were calling on me. I had a tentative design for the project at the time but didn’t convince them so I looked for other ways to make this project happen because I didn’t want to waste the money spent for the project sketch,” she explained.



“With a partner company in Romania, we filled out the forms. That was our responsibility. I don’t know what they did later. We were one of the first companies to do all the paperwork for these projects. We were also offering consultancies to municipalities. Just don’t put us in the same pot with Arhicreativ SRL. We have not cooperated with them since 2017. We like to cooperate with people who do their jobs to the end and do them qualitatively. The moment one of these two aspects is absent, that’s it,” Ion Crudu stated.

### **DESIGN MADE WITHOUT TAKING TOPOGRAPHY INTO ACCOUNT**

Ziarul de Garda (ZdG) found that both the 2017 project sketch and the first stage of the 2020 construction design were made without a graphic representation of the land surface that included planimetric details. The director of Arhicreativ SRL says he does not remember at what stage the topographical plan was done. “The topographical plan was done at the high school. I don’t remember when. Several plans were done there. I don’t know what the stages were,” Rotaru claimed.

The high school headmistress, however, assured us that the document was not missing during the execution of the project. “That’s not true. Possibly the project sketch didn’t include topography. Then he came up with a project plan in general so he could see how to do it. That initial sketch was done to comply with that European project, but when the project itself was done it was not done without taking topography into account,” Elena Pasat stated.

Nevertheless it was only in August 2020, i.e. six months after signing the design contract, that the school commissioned topographical plans worth 14,000 lei for the land adjacent to the high school; the design of the building was adjusted accordingly.

### **TENDER WON BY COMPANY WITH HIGHEST BID**

With the project design the school had commissioned from Arhicreativ SRL and following a tender, in June 2021 Durlești Town Hall awarded the construction work to ConsModern SRL founded by Serghei Straistă in 2003. In total, four businesses participated in

the tender: ConsModern SRL with a bid of 9,181,622 lei; Hiperteh SRL at 8,684,014 lei; Verilarproiect SRL, with a bid of 8,588,619 lei, and SC Luxgaz SRL at 6,977,760 lei. Although following an appeal the Town Hall was required to award the contract to Hiperteh SRL, on 11 November 2021 it nevertheless also concluded a contract with ConsModern SRL. A year later, the two entities concluded an agreement to increase the contract by 197,000 lei due to inflation, according to Deputy Mayor of Durlleşti Mihai Enachi.

### **ANOTHER MONTH, ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL TENDER**

We tried to speak with Serghei Straistă, Director of ConsModern SRL, but at first he told us that he was busy and could not talk. Later, he told us that he was in hospital and could not speak with us. In August 2021, Straistă's company won another tender from Durlleşti Town Hall—this one worth 8 million lei—for public works, architectural redevelopment, playground landscaping and street lighting in the N. Gribov residential areas.

### **TWENTY-SIX RIDERS FOR UNFORESEEN PROJECT WORK**

The construction of the annex was supposed to be completed by the end of 2022 but started with delays due to errors in the project plan, Deputy Mayor Mihai Enachi told us. “Yes, we admit that the project has not gone well from the start. At the beginning, the project director made some corrections saying that it would be better to do it in a certain way, but during the actual construction we found that the plan was unsatisfactory. The designer and the inspector are responsible for this,” Enachi stated.

Errors in the design were discovered during the excavation of the foundation, according to one rider. Twenty-five other such contract addenda followed providing for changes to the roof since the cost estimate did not include finishing work on the eaves, additional work on the gym, work to install the external sewage system and changes to the lighting in the classrooms after the headmistress had asked for the walls of two rooms to be relocated. Also the corridor that was supposed to connect the main school building with the annex was moved

a few meters downhill because according to the headmistress it was discovered that in the original plan the foundation for it was going to be dug over the heating pipes from the boiler room to the school.

Also during construction, it was found that the design did not include the external water supply and sewerage networks or the electrical supply. Also missing were the fire alarm and communication networks. The cost of all that additional work amounted to 1.7 million lei. Deputy Mayor Enachi:

Perhaps they're mistakes by the designer or maybe by the project inspector. Neither I, nor the mayor, nor the lawyer is a specialist in supervising construction projects. There were some changes made by the headmistress, but for the most part there were a lot of changes due to design flaws or oversights. The project inspector is the one responsible for certifying that the work has been done correctly and meets the standards for a high school. As long as we had the plan and an estimate with the inspector's stamp on it, and not being construction specialists and not knowing all the regulations, we started with what we had. We couldn't stop work on the annex to modify the project again because any modification had to be approved by the designer and stamped.

**ARCHITECT: "WE DREW WHAT WE WERE TOLD. I DID NOT COMMIT TO DESIGNING ENGINEERING NETWORKS."**

Asked why the project plan lacked essential elements worth about 1.7 million lei, Andrei Rotaru told us that the architect drew what the education facility had asked for:

They expressed the idea that they didn't have enough classrooms, they didn't have a gym. We kept adjusting the project. They wanted the annex in front of the school, then in back, then further up the hill, then further down. There were a lot of ideas, and we modified the project a few times. We were given some requirements, and we drew what we were told. During construction some requirements were changed. And yes, there were some oversights by the engineer as well, oversights that have been corrected. We are all human, and there can be mistakes, but there have been no egregious construction mistakes.

He claims that the fire alarm and communication networks were missing because the school didn't have the money to include them. "I did not commit to designing engineering networks. The architect does the architecture, the engineer does the engineering parts. Yes, they should have hired someone or talked to us, and we should have hired someone to do those designs," Rotaru admitted.

The project has been inspected by Tatiana Zaicenco. Contacted by *ZdG*, she placed the responsibility for the oversights on the architect. "I am responsible only for the technical part. Legal arguments among beneficiaries are not my domain. I look at whether the urban planning certificate and the project are technically in line. I don't see any issues with this project. In general, the architect is responsible for the additional work," Zaicenco stated.

### **ARCHITECT: "THEY WANTED TO SAVE FIVE PENNIES BUT SPENT FIVE MILLION"**

We analyzed the execution of the project and its inspection and the additional work required with Vasile Eremciuc, Architect and Senior Specialist at the State Service for Inspection and Expertise in Projects and Construction. He came to the conclusion that the project did not comply with several legislative and regulatory requirements and that the designer and the project inspector were responsible for the shortcomings.

"From a preliminary examination, I see problems with the project documentation. The calculation indices, the indices from which everything starts, were not correctly established. The general data sheet is the most important one. It must contain the basic data on the preparation of the project, urban planning certificates, decisions, the decision of the town hall, and other necessary documents. They are missing here. The calculation indices are presented in a very short form," Eremciuc told us.

The expert had an explanation for the flawed design, namely the low price for design services. "By volume, that design should have cost 400–500,000 lei. For 134,000 lei, they got what they got. The low price does not, however, exempt the designers from fulfilling all legislative and regulatory requirements in project documentation.

Comparing how much it would have cost if everything had been provided for originally, the difference would have been 350,000 lei. Now they have additional work worth 1.7 million lei to complete. They wanted to save five pennies and instead spent five million," expert Eremciuc said.

## **TOWN HALL LAWYER IS GODMOTHER OF ARCHITECT'S CHILD**

Liubovi Popa, the lawyer of Durlești Town Hall is a godmother of Andrei Rotaru's child. Those two along with the high school headmistress claim that the relationship between the architect and the lawyer did not help the former obtain contracts with the education facility.

"I really didn't know. I learned from my council colleagues that they are related. I then inquired what kind of relationship. At the time the contract was concluded there was no relationship. Maybe they became related later. I really didn't know. In Moldova, every second one is godparent of your children or vice versa," Headmistress Pasat stated.

"I became godmother of his child after the Hyperion contract was concluded. Never has a godparent or a close relative [of mine] participated in any public procurement, absolutely anywhere. Ms. Pasat knew him before I met him. The town didn't contract him, the high school did. He didn't participate in the tender, and if he had, I would have abstained. She did the project in 2017, and I baptized his child in 2018," Liubovi Popa asserted.

"Godparents are for the home, but work is work. When there were problems or issues, on the contrary she never supported me and we have never had a relationship like one for her to say, 'Come on, I am godmother of your child and I will solve it,' Andrei Rotaru declared.

## **CONTRACTOR AWAITS MONEY FROM NEXT CITY COUNCIL**

The annex is almost completely finished but cannot be occupied because the construction company has not received the 1.7 million

lei for the additional work because the town of Durlești has not yet approved the budget for 2023. Deputy Mayor Mihai Enachi says the company has asked the town hall for a letter of guarantee that the money will be paid.

“We continue with all the risks. The contractor will continue with all the risks. We have somehow given assurances that the next council will allocate this money. Although there is a positive opinion from the budget committee, the council has not approved it. It will be allocated when the local budget is voted on,” Mihai Enachi assured us.

Up to this stage, 11 million lei have been spent for the construction of the education annex: 8.5 million lei from the Chișinău City budget and 2.5 million lei from Durlești Municipality.

# **E-FILE SYSTEM AT THE GENERAL PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE: HOW 1.8 MILLION LEI WERE SPENT TO IMPROVE A NON-FUNCTIONING DATABASE**

**JULIETA SAVIȚCHI,**  
MOLDOVACURATA.MD, 14 November 2023

*In 2020, the General Prosecutor's Office (GPO) paid 1.8 million lei to a company to adjust and to improve the functionality of the integrated criminal record system E-File which is still not fully functional. However, the GPO has not, until recently, made any claims against the company for failing to meet its contractual obligations even though the company has received the money. A criminal case was opened only after an audit by the Court of Accounts in the summer of 2023. The company denies the charges and accuses the GPO of not contracting maintenance service.*



In 2014, the General Prosecutor's Office (GPO) started to develop an automated and integrated information system called the Criminal and Criminological Information Register that was to include data on crimes, criminal cases and offenders. The GPO set up a working group to steer the process, and in July 2015 announced that the system – since renamed “Criminal Prosecution: E-File” had been launched. At that point, Prosecutor General Corneliu Gurin was talking about the system's functionality in the future as it was just about to be put into operation.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP Moldova) was involved in the development of the system through a justice reform support project. As announced in a press release issued by UNDP at the time, “The development of the system and the software and hardware components in the amount of about 122,000 US dollars, was financed by the General Prosecutor's Office.” This fact is also recorded in the Report of the Court of Accounts of August 2023: “According to a hand-over act dated 30 June 2016, the General Prosecutor's Office received the intangible asset AIS ‘Criminal Prosecution: E-File’ in the amount of 949,600 lei from UNDP, recorded in the accounting records under account 317110 Intangible Assets,” the report states.

Although the system was launched in 2016, it was not yet in use, so



on 1 July 2017, Eduard Harunjen, the Prosecutor General at the time, issued an order to launch and implement the platform, requiring prosecutors to enter information about their cases therein. In the end, however, the platform proved to be ineffective due to its slow data processing speed, the need to complete the system with templates and connections with government databases, and the lack of maintenance services.

## **GPO LEADERSHIP DECIDES TO DEVELOP E-FILE PLATFORM**

On 6 August 2019, Acting Prosecutor General Dumitru Robu issued a ruling to approve the Action Plan on the Development and Maintenance of the E-File system. The problems mentioned were the slow data processing speed and the need to complete it with templates and with interconnections with other government databases. It was therefore decided that a company should be contracted to make adjustments to the existing system to make it fully functional.

In November 2019, Alexandr Stoianoglo was appointed as Prosecutor General. In 2020, the new leadership ordered a public tender for the procurement of development and maintenance services for the E-File platform.

That procurement is, however, not to be found in the GPO procurement plan for 2020, nor had any expenditures been planned for the procurement of this service. The tender notice was published on 1 October 2020 with a starting price of 1.5 million lei.

According to Court of Accounts auditors, the working group produced very generalized terms of reference that did not contain concrete plans for the functions that needed to be developed. “To note that according to that document, the period of the contract was set for two months which was not a sufficient timeframe to ensure the development, testing and putting into operation the IT product developed; thus the working group was from the start limiting the number of potential developers to participate in the public tender,” the Report of the Court of Accounts of August 2023 said.

## **CONVICTED MONEY LAUNDERER'S FIRM WINS TENDER**

Only one company, Esempla Systems SRL founded by businessman Arcadie Topalo, submitted a bid for the tender.

In 2016, Topalo was criminally investigated for laundering particularly large amounts of money through companies registered to intermediaries, including street people. The businessman had been in pre-trial detention for almost seven months on 3 May 2017 when Chişinău District Court sentenced him to five years in prison with a suspended sentence and released him from custody. So although Topalo was found guilty of laundering large amounts of money from an organized criminal group, a plea agreement was reached.

The sworn statement submitted by the bidder denied any involvement of the company's decision-makers in money laundering operations, fraud or membership of an organized criminal group which could have served as grounds for non-admission to the tender. The contract between the GPO and Esempla Systems SRL worth 1,794,000 lei including VAT was signed on 11 November 2020.

## **CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS NOT HONORED IN THE END**

A month later, the work was handed over and was paid for by the GPO. The Court of Accounts noted, however, that the minutes of the handover signed by the then head of the Information Technology and Cybercrime Section of the GPO and the company's representative were missing a number and date and that the execution of the work had thus been erroneously confirmed. Based on those minutes, a payment order was prepared, and the amount of 1,795 million was transferred to Esempla Systems accounts on 21 December 2020. The auditors say the product for which payment had been made was in fact not delivered. "According to the information provided by the current Operational Manager of the Information Technology and Cybercrime Section of the GPO, no developments on the AIS Criminal Prosecution: E-File platform have been carried out, and this information product is not used by prosecutors, which means that the minutes on service handover contain inaccurate data regarding the reception of development services," the report states. They also found that according to the contract, the GPO should have tested the platform before paying for the services, and that did not happen.

The Information Technology and Cybercrime Section of the GPO tried to revive the system in the following two years through

communications and claims to the service provider. On 22 February 2023, Esempla Systems replied to GPO: “Esempla repeatedly tested the E-File and configured the modules for archiving and restoring case files and document templates according to the terms of reference and presented this to the representatives of the General Prosecutor’s Office on 13 Feb 2023.”

**COMPANY REPRESENTATIVE: “WE HONORED OUR OBLIGATIONS. THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR’S OFFICE SHOULD HAVE CONTRACTED MAINTENANCE SERVICES.”**

The Director of Esempla Systems SRL Dorin Grițcan told us that the company had honored its contractual obligations and even provided a number of services free of charge for the prosecutors:

There is a signed document, a fiscal invoice, that we have honored our obligations. We had to optimize the system, and we did that. But the system cannot work perfectly because it is old. The GPO should have contracted maintenance service, but they didn’t. They thought we should provide that. They just knew how to call us and say, ‘Come and fix it!’ We would go to them and provide them free services which had not been provided in the contract. Just so you understand, the institution does not have an IT specialist. It’s very hard to deal with them. We recently proposed an action plan to them to rectify the situation, but they haven’t replied to our messages. We hear now that they intend to start a criminal case. Prosecutors shouldn’t have poured mud on our heads but should have gone the legal way. We have very serious clients and an impeccable reputation.

**CRIMINAL CASE WHEN ALL IS “WELL”**

Several prosecutors, on condition of anonymity, told us that they stopped storing data and using the platform around 2019. The reason is that the system is cumbersome to operate, difficult to access, and sometimes they had to wait for hours to enter data into it.

The facts found by the Court of Accounts concerning the E-File platform are currently being investigated by the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office in a criminal case opened after the Court of

Accounts audit. The GPO has, however, informed us in a recent reply to our request for information that the system is working. The GPO:

The General Prosecutor's Office has examined your request for information regarding the Automated Information System Criminal Prosecution: E-File (hereinafter referred to as the system). The system was launched and implemented on 1 July 2017 (pursuant to Prosecutor General Order No. 4/23 of 23 May 2017). From its launch and until now, the system has been operational and prosecutors or other persons authorized to enter data into it have been entering information on their criminal cases on a daily basis. Accordingly, the daily input of information into the system by users enables the recording of criminal cases and participants, up-to-date solutions and the generation of various statistical reports. In order to maintain the functionality of the system at an optimal level, maintenance/development measures are systematically undertaken. With reference to the facts found and set forth in the report by the Court of Accounts, they are being examined in a criminal case by the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office.

We sent a request for information to UNDP Moldova to find out whether the institution has monitored the effectiveness of the system to which it contributed in 2016. "UNDP developed the E-File system from financial sources provided by the General Prosecutor's Office and transmitted it to the beneficiary in 2015. The functionality of E-File was confirmed and accepted by the beneficiary. The use of the system, as well as further investments in its maintenance and optimization are the responsibility of the beneficiary," was the UNDP response.

# **CAHUL THEATRE'S WOES: 30 MILLION LEI SPENT, ANOTHER 13 MILLION LEI NEEDED, ONE CONTRACTOR DEAD, AND ONE TROUPE LOSING HOPE**

**NATALIA ZAHARESCU,**  
ZIARUL DE GARDĂ, 30 November 2023

*With the cornerstone laid in 2014, with generous funding from the Romanian Government, with tens of millions of lei spent so far, the new premises of the Musical-Dramatic Theatre Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu in Cahul is still not ready. The work is stuck at the last stage. The new building has started to show signs of wear while the authorities blame unforeseen circumstances, including the pandemic. The deadline for commissioning was missed, the contractor who was doing the work has died, and the contractor's site diary has disappeared. During this time, eight governments and six ministers responsible for culture have changed in Moldova. More than 30 million lei have been spent so far, including on procurements criticized by the Court of Accounts, and almost 13 million lei are still needed to finish the work. The theatre troupe performs in a small hall in an old building and is desperate to finally be able to perform on the new stage.*



The old, still functional building of the Cahul Theatre and the new, unfinished building are close to each other. They are separated by a small city park which the actors cross several times a day as they rehearse sometimes on the hill (in the old building) and sometimes in the valley (in the new building) where there is only a rehearsal room on the ground floor. The actors' dressing rooms and the administrative offices located on the second, third and fourth levels are furnished, but communication networks have not yet been installed. Electric cables hang from the ceilings, and the bathrooms are not connected to the water system. The auditorium which seats almost 300 has unpainted walls, and the chairs purchased three years ago are still in boxes behind the big stage.

The troupe has been performing since 2000 in the theatre's old premises. This used to be the People's Courthouse. The auditorium has a small stage and seats 90 people. Additional chairs can be brought in if needed bringing the seating capacity to 100 or so. Two small rooms serve as dressing rooms for the actors, and the corridors are narrow.

"It's a very intimate atmosphere," says Gheorghe Mândru, the theatre director as he gives us a quick tour of the old building. He

stresses that the stage is suitable for children's shows but, "It's small for bigger projects." His hope is that he can continue to use the old building's small stage, where he can nurture young theatre-lovers and then take them for a stroll through the park beyond to the new, as yet unfinished, building to watch performances on the big stage.

### **"IT'S ALMOST-ALMOST READY."**

The new premises were to be put into operation in 2018, the Centenary Year of the Great Union, Gheorghe Mândru recalled. "We reached the last 100 meters; the situation was that we had to complete the auditorium. The chairs have already been brought in and stored. The acoustic overlays and chair assembly are left to do. Well, there's still work to be done before assembly. The stage is practically ready with all its mechanics, lighting and sound. And the second thing left to complete is the foyer. Otherwise, it is almost-almost ready," Gheorghe Mândru said as he showed us the inside of the unfinished theatre building.

### **CORNERSTONE LAID IN 2014 BY VICTOR PONTA AND IURIE LEANCA: 800,000 EUROS FROM ROMANIA**

In October 2014 in Cahul, a memorandum was signed in the presence of the then Prime Ministers of the Republic of Moldova and Romania Iurie Leanca and Victor Ponta. The Bucharest government promised a donation of 800,000 euros for the construction of the new building. That was also when the cornerstone was laid. Another 400,000 euros were pledged from the Republic of Moldova's budget. "Shows are performed now in an old building adapted as a theatre," said a press release from the Chişinău government announcing the good news.

Nearly 10 years later, the troupe is still performing in the same old building. The institution appointed to manage the money and the project was the Ministry of Culture headed at the time by Monica Babuc. Since then, eight governments have changed and six ministers have been in charge of that ministry (which at one

point was integrated into the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research but then again became a separate ministry), but the building has not yet been completed.

Construction started two years after the memorandum was signed. On 20 January 2016, the Cahul company Lumea Calității SRL (World of Quality) owned by businessman Ion Ghindă won the tender organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, i.e., a 20.6 million lei contract for the construction of the theatre.

Before that, in April 2015 the Ministry of Culture purchased design services worth 432,000 lei from the company Arcada-LV SRL. Back in 2012, the same company won a tender worth 678,000 lei with the Ministry of Culture to rebuild the old premises, an idea that was later abandoned because it would have been more costly than building a new theatre from scratch as Emilia Ristic, Head of the Institutional Management Directorate at the current Ministry of Culture, explained to Ziarul de Gardă (ZdG).

### **FIRST DELAY—UNDERGROUND GALLERIES**

Shortly after the preparatory work began, two underground galleries were found at the foundation site. This discovery put the project on hold for a few months as the ministry could not decide whether to keep both or just one of the underground chambers. In the end, one gallery was preserved and the second was covered over. The foundation of the theatre had to be moved a few metres.

### **MASONRY IS VERY SOUND, VERY STRONG**

According to the data on the public procurement portal, on 13 December 2018 the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research signed another contract for almost 1.7 million lei with Lumea Calității SRL, and on 23 December 2019, the deadline for completion of the work was extended once again, but it is not mentioned by how much. Once a decision was made on the underground galleries, the work resumed. The walls were raised and interior was ready to be finished. “The masonry is very sound, very strong.



It was done during the period when this project was being very thoroughly controlled, including by the Romanian Government. Because at that time in the first phase, the budget was from the Romanian Government and experts came from the Romanian Government at each stage,” theatre director Mândru recalled.

### **NEW OBSTACLE—LACK OF INTERIOR DESIGN PLAN**

Work stopped again in 2018 because Lumea Calității SRL needed an interior design plan; it took several months to develop it Ms Ristic from the ministry recalled. Sergiu Cojocaru was the chief architect of the project and Director of Arcada-LV SRL which won the design tender. He has his own opinion on why time was wasted. “It took a while because they [ministry] were looking for new solutions. In the end when they came to me, I was busy for a while with other, bigger projects. After that, I made the design and then he passed away [contractor Ion Ghindă] and it dragged on. From year to year, it dragged on.”

The architect says the design is now ready and was updated this year in terms of materials and cost estimates.

### **NOTHING WAS DONE FROM 2019 TO 2022**

Theatre director Mândru says that no work at all was done in 2019 and 2020 on the construction of the building. “The Covid-19 pandemic started then. It was that period when everything turned upside down, and basically, we didn’t understand: no work because of the pandemic or no work because of other financial ‘pandemics.’ That’s why it wasn’t even clear at the time. Basically, it was a total blur in 2019 and 2020.”

According to Emilia Ristic from the Ministry of Culture:

Maybe the political factor and the Ministry of Culture merging with the Ministry of Education—all of this—there were changes in processes, employees within the ministry, until it got into the details. I think that was also a problem that stalled the work longer than it should have been. (...) Nothing was done from 2019 to 2022. They were waiting for this design plan. The design, in fact, was

made in 2019 during the time of Minister Mrs. Liliana Onofrei. The date when they asked the architect to make the design was 10 July, but it took time. It was 2020 ... I think when the contract was signed... The director of Lumea Calităţii then died, and the company went bankrupt and entered into a very difficult, serious, financial situation.

**DECEASED ENTREPRENEUR'S BROTHER:  
"THE PROJECT IS NO LONGER FUNDED."**

On 14 February 2022, the founder of Lumea Calităţii SRL Ion Ghinda passed away. He was found dead in the outskirts of the Village of Colibaşi, Cahul District. According to the Cahul Police Inspectorate, no signs of violent death were detected at the time. His sudden death led Lumea Calităţii SRL into bankruptcy.

ZdG asked Ion Ghindă's brother Alexei Ghindă if the work at the theatre in Cahul had been delayed due to lack of money and if the state still owed his brother's company about 700,000 lei for work that had been done but not paid for. Alexei Ghindă:

The project is no longer funded. All the work has been done in full, to my knowledge, for the amounts paid. Even more was done worth around 700,000 lei that had not been procured originally with the understanding that it would be paid for. And that's why it stopped. During those times when the government was dissolved during Plahotniuc's time, everyone changed at the Ministry of Culture and didn't want to continue the funding. That's why the funding and the work stopped. They didn't sign the contract for the extra work on the inside. The work was done, and when others changed in the government, they didn't want to accept the contract. And from that time on, no further funding was provided. We continued the work for 3-4-5 months, even half a year after that.

According to Alexei Ghindă, the development of the interior design was not financed at that time either. We asked him what the ministry was telling them: "I think nobody gave any answer for half a year, then we were told there was no money," the entrepreneur's brother recalled.

**“THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE HAD ONLY A FEW STAFF MEMBERS AND THEY WERE NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE INVESTMENT PROCESS.”**

We were determined to find out from Emilia Ristic of the Ministry of Culture what had happened and why no work was done from August 2021 when the ministry managed the project and was separate from the Ministry of Education until 2022 when Ion Ghindă died. Ms Ristic explained:

When the Ministry of Education split from the Ministry of Culture in 2021, the people who were involved in the Cahul project, who were involved in the capital investment process, remained at the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Culture had only a few staff members, and they were not familiar with the investment process (...) Until hiring was done in the ministry, until people were involved in the project again, they had to study the situation first, and all this took time.

After Ion Ghindă's death, the situation remained uncertain. For the theatre to be completed, it was necessary to assess the work already done and paid for and the volume of work still required. This decision was made with difficulty at the Ministry of Culture, according to Ms Ristic:

It was not understood at the time why this audit was needed on work carried out. They could not understand why we needed it. Why can't we put it out to tender and start the work? I was explaining to them that it was necessary and why it was necessary, that you have to have a document that tells you from A to Z that you have a given situation, and then again from A to Z that the situation we are creating now will be the following...

**“WORK WAS FOUND TO BE OF POOR QUALITY”**

Sergiu Cojocaru, the chief architect of the project and Director of Arcada-LV SRL that won the tender for design services, made an expert examination only in September 2023. He found cracks in the facade that would cost several million lei to repair. Director Cojocaru:

First of all, we evaluated the work that had not been completed and, at the same time, we found work that was of poor quality, that had deteriorated: cracks and deterioration of the exterior plaster that covered the thermal insulation on the facade that needed to be totally renovated. (...) There were many small details that did not meet requirements. A lot of work was not done and remained unfinished because prices suddenly went up. (...) Most of all, the facade needed to be insulated; there is a lot of work there. I don't remember the amounts we presented for verification, but it was about one or two million lei.

The cracks in the outer walls of the building can be seen with the naked eye as the *ZdG* team can attest. Emilia Ristic also spoke about them. "On the structural side there are no problems. On the finishings side, for sure this period has left a lot of marks on that building: cracks in the walls, doors that are already deteriorating and many details, maybe minor ones, but they are still visible and present an image that is not suitable for a new building.

**THE SITE DIARY HAS DISAPPEARED. "THERE IS AN INTEREST HERE."**

It was also found that the contractor's site diary was missing, i.e. the document recording all the work done to date, including work not visible to the naked eye. Sergiu Cojocaru:

The site diary was lost with all the entries that were made by the technicians; now there's nothing, and we can't find the culprit. The papers that would explain the hidden work, what we can't see, are missing. (...) The site manager says he passed it on to the contractor, the director, who is dead. Now all the blame is on him [deceased contractor], he is not here, and we cannot find it. There is an interest here. Whose fault it is, we can't say. But there are questions and anyone could have 'lost' it, in quotation marks. Several site supervisors changed during the work. That was the general contractor's approach.

We also contacted the latest site manager Dumitru Cretu. He didn't want to talk on the phone but agreed to talk face to face. Later, he refused to have any conversation with us at all.

Asked by ZdG about the disappearance of the site diary, Alexei Ghindă, Ion Ghindă's brother, said he did not know about that situation.

## **ACCORDING TO DOCUMENTATION AND ACCORDING TO REALITY**

In order to see if all the work has really been done and what solution could be found for the disappearance of the site diary, in August 2023 the Ministry of Culture filed a request with the National Inspectorate for Technical Supervision (NITS). Emilia Ristic:

According to the documentation, on paper it appears that everything Lumea Calității SRL had committed to do has been done, and it has been paid for it. We have nevertheless requested an expert examination in terms of execution and quality of the work performed from the National Inspectorate for Technical Supervision. (...) We are asking for clarification on the following issues. One: How and by what legal procedure can the loss of the site diary be documented? Two: What do we do, how do we continue the implementation of the project? Three: An inspection of the volume and quality of the work should be carried out. To date, we have not received a reply to this request.

According to her, the ministry will not wait for a response from NITS but will organize a public procurement to complete the construction of the theatre. The evaluation made by the chief architect is now with the project inspectors, and then new procurement procedures will start.

## **NEARLY 13 MILLION LEI MORE ARE NEEDED TO COMPLETE THE WORK**

The next step is to procure work estimated at 12.9 million lei for the stage, the auditorium, the foyer, work on the exterior walls, and the completion of bathrooms. Emilia Ristic explained the process and why work might not start until spring 2024:

We are starting the tender in December and bidding is planned

for January. We have to give them a minimum of 20 days to prepare their bids. Given that December is a month with holidays—Christmas, New Year’s—for sure we will set the deadline for opening the bids towards the end of January. February is the month in which we will examine the offers. If we have no disputes, we will have the contract signed at best in February. If we have disputes, we’ll go another month, and it will be spring.

### **OVER 30 MILLION LEI SPENT SO FAR AND PROCUREMENTS CRITICIZED BY COURT OF ACCOUNTS**

According to the data on the public procurement portal, so far 30.4 million lei have been spent for the work on the new Cahul Theatre and on procurements of goods and services to which small procurements have been added. In addition, 678,000 lei have been spent on repairs for the old premises. Inside the new building, some finishing work has been done; furniture and sound and stage lighting equipment has been procured with money from the ministry and the theatre institution. These procurement procedures were, however, criticized in an audit report by the Court of Accounts (CoA) of Moldova, presented in September 2021.

From the report we learned that the work was supposed to be completed by 31 December 2018. An additional agreement changed the date to 31 December 2019 but without extending the validity of the bank guarantee in the amount of one million lei for the good execution of the contract, “...which determines the risk of non-completion or unsatisfactory completion of the works found,” the report reads.

### **LOW-VALUE PURCHASES: “IF YOU HAVE MONEY, DO IT.”**

The CoA also notes in its report that for several low-value purchases, “...information on how to select economic operators, analyze prices and select the most advantageous price” was not provided. This involves finishing work carried out by the theatre’s administration on the upper floors, in the actors’ dressing rooms and administrative offices, as well as in the rehearsal hall, said theatre

director Gheorghe Mândru who said he had to do this work in order to move the furniture in. “We wrote official letters asking for permission ... What they allowed us to do came in one telephone call: If you have money, do it. And then, not having a document from the ministry saying that we had the right to do such repairs, we got sanctioned and fined. But we did it anyway.”

### **CHAIRS FROM THE COMPANY OF THE SON OF MINISTER OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND RESEARCH**

The CoA also noted that the theatre chairs were purchased as early as 2020 for about one million lei from the company Cartdidact SRL owned by the son of former Minister of Education, Culture and Research Igor Şarov. According to CoA, Igor Sharov signed the order to allocate the funds on 7 September 2020; however, no conflict of interest was found as the procurement contract had been signed with Cahul Theatre. The CoA also found that although the delivery deadline was 60 days after the contract was signed, the chairs were delivered four months late on 27 July 2021.

The CoA audit also found that, “The Ministry of Education Culture and Research allocated these funds knowing from the outset that the construction of the theatre building was not complete, as it is the beneficiary of this construction. A similar situation of premature allocation of funds is found with the purchase of the awning in the amount of 333,200 lei.”

The chairs are still stacked in cardboard boxes behind the stage. Gheorghe Mândru however, believes that they were not purchased too early. “It wasn’t too early; the work with the venue simply was delayed too much. We bought them in 2020 while the theatre was supposed to be inaugurated in 2018. How can they be bought too early in 2020?” We also asked Igor Şarov for a reaction, but he has not responded so far. He texted us to contact him later but never answered our calls.

### **“WE DROWNED ASHORE, AS THEY SAY.”**

The actors of the Musical-Dramatic Theatre Company B.P. Hasdeu in Cahul are looking forward to performing on the big

stage in the new building and are disappointed that the work has been delayed for so long. Master of Arts actress Aurica Țurcanu:

We want it very much, especially since it was like a tease. When they told us that we were going to have it, we were excited, we were expecting that sooner rather than later, in a few years. And we believed it, we followed how the construction was taking place... And now, here we are. It just stopped and is not moving. We drowned ashore, as they say. And we're really sorry, because we had enough plans to perform here, projects for the big stage.

**“CAHUL DESERVES A NEW THEATRE. ROMANIA DID ITS JOB, GAVE THE MONEY, NOW IT'S UP TO THE MINISTRY TO CONTRIBUTE, AND LET'S FINALLY OPEN IT.”**

Actor Igor Caras, People's Artist, is a member of the theatre troupe, and he recalled that the current Minister of Culture Sergiu Prodan himself had promised that the theatre would be ready in autumn this year:

The minister gave his word on the stage last year that the theatre would be open this autumn. Well, you've seen that it's not open. We cannot say it to the ministry, but the ministry has funded this show that we are putting on now, “The Story of Our Beautiful Nation,” and we're working. Please! I have addressed the Prime Minister, I am addressing you, too. Do everything, write as it is, fight! Cahul deserves a new theatre, the construction is financed by Romania. Romania did its job, gave the money, now it's up to the ministry to contribute, and let's finally open it.

Theatre Director Mândru hopes that the new premises will be ready in 2024: “You know, we initially understood that the work would be completed this autumn and we would be able to open by the New Year, with the opening of the 2024 season. But, again, you can't match plans from home with plans at the fair. We're hoping, based on our intuition and what we can see, that it will happen no later than 2024. No later. Because there has been too much procrastination already.”

ZdG asked Cahul Mayor Nicolae Dandiș if the completion of the construction should become an immediate priority for the



authorities. He said, "I think that after so long, the excuse that they don't have people at the ministry to deal with this project as a priority no longer holds. Unless there is a concrete deadline at the highest level and sanctions are imposed on irresponsible officials, we are unlikely to see the light. I believe that things need to be coordinated above the ministry. I call on the country's leadership to make this project a priority."

**MINISTER SERGIU PRODAN: "IT WILL CERTAINLY BE READY IN 2024. IT IS A PRIORITY TO COMPLETE THIS PROJECT."**

Culture Minister Sergiu Prodan gave assurances that there are no financial impediments at present and that the theatre will be ready next year:

There are a number of problems, and they are technical. There are no financial or political obstacles. There are technical impediments because of the death of the head of the implementing company, because of the pandemic. With the death of the person who had the signed contracts and the disappearance of the whole set of documents on this project, the continuation of the project requires the restoration of the site diary. After that, we have to announce a competition, a public tender for this project and in spring to start the construction (...) It will certainly be ready in 2024. All these problems have already been solved. There was the question of who takes responsibility for the work done so that we can move on. The funding is there. It is a priority to complete this project.

**"THE MINISTER WAS VIRTUALLY THE ONLY EMPLOYEE OF THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE FOR THE FIRST THREE MONTHS."**

Asked about his actions after becoming Minister of Culture in 2021 when the construction of the theatre was already behind schedule, Sergiu Prodan referred to the slow reorganization process:

In 2021, the Ministry of Education gradually handed over all

the files and archives to the newly recreated Ministry of Culture as people were being hired. The Ministry of Education was the successor to the former ministry [of Education, Culture and Research] and this handover was finally completed only in 2022. The minister was virtually the only employee of the Ministry of Culture for the first three months. So, the Ministry of Culture did not have the capacity at that time to intervene, to ask for an account, because it did not have all the archives, all the documents in place.

**FORMER MINISTER: “I AM SURPRISED THAT YOU ARE TELLING ME THAT THE WORK IS NOT FINISHED.”**

We also asked former ministers of culture since 2014 when the memorandum on financing the construction of the new building was signed what they had done to complete it.

**Liliana Nicolaescu-Onofrei, Minister of Education, Culture and Research from 8 June to 14 November 2019 (Sandu Government):** “For all the projects that were capital investment projects, we did not manage to move anything serious forward in five months, except that we ordered that where construction work was involved to monitor it very carefully at each stage, to do the necessary checks.”

**Corneliu Popovici, Minister of Education, Culture and Research from 14 November 2019 to 16 March 2020 (Chicu Government):** “When I left, the last 100 meters remained. That it didn’t go all the way is already a big enigma and incredible. I have not followed the fate of the theatre in the past year, although I was sure that everything was already ok. When I was minister, things were going well. If it had been anything out of the ordinary, I would have remembered. But the work was going well and had to be completed. I am surprised that you are telling me that the work is not finished.”

**Igor Şarov, Minister of Education, Culture and Research from 16 March to 9 November 2020 (Chicu Government)** did not answer *ZdG* questions.

**Lilia Pogolşa, Minister of Education, Culture and Research from 9 November 2020 to 6 August 2021 (Chicu Government):** “I think the best thing for you to do is to call the ministry, the people in charge, to collect everything that is in the ministry about

everything that has been done and they will give you a documented, correct and accurate answer. I'm sorry, I'm late for a meeting."

**Monica Babuc, Minister of Culture from 30 May 2013 to 26 July 2017 and Minister of Education, Culture and Research from 26 July 2017 to 8 June 2019 (Leancă, Gaburici, Streleț and Filip Governments).** She listed a number of impediments that allegedly delayed the construction of the theatre during her terms of office, noting that the memorandum initially provided for a project implementation period of 2 years and 6 months (until June 2017), but was subsequently extended several times, "...due to the complexity of the task facing the contractor and, in particular, unforeseen circumstances." These included the need to update the project documentation, the discovery of the underground galleries and subsequent relocation of the foundation, and unfavourable climatic conditions (cold season): "However, by 31 October 2018, the Romanian grant funds had been used in full and in full compliance with the provisions of the memorandum, as established by the audit carried out by the independent auditor Consulting-Modern SRL at the request of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. At the same time, the contract with the firm carrying out the construction, which was due to end on 31 December 2018, was extended until 31 December 2019 due to changes in the project following the discovery of underground galleries. The Moldovan side was to finalize its contractual provisions on its contribution to the construction of the theatre that were introduced in the budget 2019. I ended my term of office at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research in mid-June 2019, i.e. half a year before the deadline stipulated in the contract for the completion of the construction work, so actions after this period are to be discussed with my successors who took over responsibilities in this regard."

**ROMANIAN EMBASSY IN MOLDOVA: "THERE ARE STILL SOME REGRETTABLE DELAYS WHICH MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCEPT THE WORK AT THIS STAGE."**

We requested a comment from the Romanian Embassy in Moldova, as the project was funded by money provided by the

Romanian Government in the total amount of 800,000 euros. Their reply:

Regarding the new premises for the Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu Theatre in Cahul, we confirm that the Romanian Embassy in Chişinău is in regular contact with the management of the theatre and with the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova.

The completion of this important project is a recurrent topic in our discussions, and I can assure you that there is willingness on both sides to complete the project as soon as possible.

In this regard, it is worth recalling that the project phase financed by the Romanian side was successfully completed. There are still some regrettable delays which make it impossible to accept the work at this stage.

We are confident that all these shortcomings will be resolved soon, including by accelerating the efforts of the relevant authorities in Chişinău. For further information, we recommend that you contact the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova and the theatre management.

# PHANTOM PROJECTS IN GAGAUZIA ON EUROPEAN MONEY

**PIOTR GARCIU,**  
freelancer, RISE.MD, 13 November 2023

*In the 2015 elections for Gagauz Autonomy Bashkan, Irina Vlah used pro-Russian slogans, promising the electorate a better life with Russian help; however, the money for a better life in the autonomy eventually came from the European Union. The funds provided were sufficient not only to support local entrepreneurs but also to modernize local public authorities and even to “euro repair” the office of the head of the autonomy as well as other rooms in the Gagauz Executive. RISE Moldova journalists studied the internal documentation on a European grant offered to Gagauzia and found that some of the three million euros was used by the autonomy authorities for phantom projects that turned out to be useless.*



“Russia is our basic strategic partner” and “It is in our power to be together with Russia” were Irina Vlah’s election slogans in 2015 after which she became Bashkan of the Gagauz Autonomy in the Republic of Moldova. She led the region for three terms from 2015 to 2023. During her third year in office, an agreement was signed with the European Union (EU) that allocated three million euros to implement the project “Support to Local Public Authorities” (SLPA). The project was to be implemented for two years, i.e., until summer 2019; however, it was extended by one year.

### **EUROPEAN UNION FUNDS**

The implementation of the SLPA project in Gagauzia also benefited Irina Vlah. For example, her office was repaired with funds from the European project although no provision had been made for that. “From 2017 to 2019, the electrical installation in the building caught fire three times, so the repair became an urgent necessity,” explained representatives of the Executive Committee as to how part of the grant was used to repair some rooms in the institution. They refused, however, to say how much was spent on renovation work, nor did we get an answer when we tried to find out how the renovation of the offices had improved the quality of work of the Gagauz authorities.

A year after the launch of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Irina Vlah recorded her speech in the very office repaired with European funds. She then repeated one of the falsehoods about a possible war in Transnistria and the European Union's attempts to fund the war industry.

### **CONSULTANTS PAID 900 EUROS FOR ONE DAY'S WORK**

With support from five international consultants, one of the important components of the project was to make the work of local public authorities more efficient. The project budget indicated that one day's work for each consultant was to be remunerated at 900 euros which was three times the average monthly wage in Gagauzia in 2019. In total, the project provided more than 430,000 euros (about 9 million lei) for the work of the five international consultants plus more than 50,000 euros for per diems. We were not able to find out what the total amount spent on the consultants was in the end as Executive Committee officials refused to answer this question.

### **COMMUNICATION EXPERT REFUSES TO COMMUNICATE**

The project budgeted 180,000 euros for a communication and public partnership consultant. This work was entrusted to international expert and communication specialist with the SLPA project Vineta Kleine whose tasks included the development of the Executive Committee's communication strategy for 2019–2020. We tried to get Vineta Kleine's assessment of the results of the project by sending her a WhatsApp message. She declined to provide a response, explaining that journalists are to initially get a subject's consent for an interview and only then discuss the format and ask questions. "I look forward to your answer to the question of how you got hold of my personal telephone number so that we can continue working on your request," the expert wrote in her reply to our reporter. "First of all, you should apologize for using a person's personal telephone number and state who gave it to you. In this specific case, my personal data was disclosed without my consent, which can be qualified as a breach of confidentiality," she added.

## **“GOLDEN” ACTS DEVELOPED BY INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS**

Among the strategies developed by the international consultants to make the work of local public authorities more efficient was one to reduce the number of directorates on the Executive Committee. There are currently 14 of them, the same as the number of ministries in the entire Moldovan government. Despite that recommendation, the Gagauz authorities refused with representatives of the Executive Committee explaining that such a reduction would require changes in Gagauz and national legislation and in their opinion, reducing the number of ministries at the national level had proved to be negative.

We have not been able to contact Ilmars Solims, the expert who developed that strategy. He did not reply to our email, Facebook or Telegram messages. We did manage to contact Jadranka Kungulovska from North Macedonia, the consultant who dealt with issues related to increasing the quality of legislative initiatives in Gagauzia. The expert told us that she worked in Comrat from September 2018 to mid-October 2018 and submitted a report on legislation to Vadim Ceban with whom she also discussed the contents of the document. “We agreed that any comments and clarifications would be sent to me additionally, and the other part of my contribution as an expert would be provided within the remaining 24 working days via online communication (obviously without my per diems). I finally did all the work and was paid only for the 36 working days when I worked in Comrat. (...) Subsequently, I asked (via email) Mr. Ceban about the status of the report and additional assistance but did not receive answers to these questions. The other 24 days of work under the contract have not been used/paid, although I requested that the conditions of the contract be fulfilled (on both sides), as previously agreed with Mr. Ceban and the project team,” Kungulovska said. Referring to the assessment of project implementation, she said she did not have information to answer to this question.

## **CLASSIFIED DATA**

In addition to the international consultants, the project also incurred costs related to the remuneration of national experts and four



permanent staff. In total, the project budgeted just over 800,000 euros (around 16 million lei) for the consultants' salaries and fees, per diems and international travel. How much of this amount was finally spent on salaries the representatives of the Executive Committee refused to tell us.

### **PROJECT'S MOST IMPORTANT COMPONENT**

According to the project's Facebook page, the most important component was the development of an electronic paper-flow system. This involved software that would enable employees from different parts of the Executive Committee to exchange documents via the internet. Eight million lei (about 400,000 euros) was earmarked for the creation of this system as well as several others including the Executive Committee's staff record system, the donor coordination system and the Single Information Portal of Gagauzia developed on the basis of the old Executive Committee's website.

In October 2022, representatives of the Executive Committee claimed that the electronic paper-flow system had become operational and was being used by all entities; however, three years after the end of the project in 2020, not all directorates of the Executive Committee are connected to the system. For example, Piotr Manol, Head of the Justice Directorate, said that as of the end of September 2023, the entity he heads had not been connected. Marina Semionova, Head of the Culture Directorate, did not say whether or not the system had been implemented insisting instead that the questions be sent to her in a formal request. At the time of publication of this investigation, i.e. a few months later, we had not received a reply from her. The Construction Directorate also had difficulty telling us whether they were using the electronic paper-flow system.

In contrast, representatives of six other entities on the Executive Committee said they use the system, but none of them could tell us when exactly the system went live and whether officials had any objections to the delay in the launch date. According to Veaceslav Cunev, President of the National Association of ICT Companies, it was unrealistic to complete such a project by the deadline indicated

in the tender notice. “My company has implemented dozens of public systems. I couldn’t imagine how this could be done. I mean, it would be feasible if someone had a ready product, a just-right product that would not require any coordination, just to be implemented and ready to go.”

## **DONOR COORDINATION PLATFORM LEFT IN THE LURCH**

The assistance provided by international organizations is an important part of the Gagauzia Autonomy’s budget. According to information from the Executive Committee, over eight years, projects worth a total of more than one billion lei (about 50 million euros) have been implemented in the region. In order to better inform citizens and public authorities about those projects, the SLPA budget included funding for the creation of a donor coordination system. The plan was for this system to collect all the information on investments and grants offered to the autonomy by international organizations.

The first internet mention of the donor coordination system that we managed to identify dates back to April 2022, although the platform was to be launched as early as December 2019. Information on projects from 2018–2022 had been posted on the platform, except that the news feed had not been updated since February 2021 and the site’s search engine did not identify any information about the SLPA project, even though the platform was developed specifically with funding from this project.

The Executive Committee claims that the developer launched the website on 13 May 2020 and sent instructions on how to complete the content to the External Relations Directorate of Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) Gagauzia. In a comment to RISE Moldova, Anastasia Ciolak, head of this entity, initially said that the platform had been updated. Later, she said that information about projects was being posted after their completion and that in 2023 there were very few projects funded by international donors which was precisely why information for the current year was missing. “No external donor projects have been implemented so far. Now, for example, we are building an industrial college. When it is completed, we will post information about the completion of the project. [...] I have been in this position for a short time.

We will definitely publish news and reports as soon as I am appointed,” she assured us. She held the position of Deputy Head of the External Relations Directorate in the previous Executive Committee.

## **INVISIBLE LAWS**

Another problem that the EU-funded project was supposed to solve concerned coordinating the national legislation of Moldova with that of ATU Gagauzia. Due to differences in interpretation, the laws of the Gagauz ATU have been overturned several times by the region’s courts, creating new tensions in Comrat. To avoid such incidents, the SLPA project budgeted for the remuneration of a group of 7 lawyers to draft 16 laws.

The group was led by Ion Creangă, Head of the Legal Section of the Moldovan Parliament. According to Creangă, his team of experts drafted 16 initiatives over the course of about 12 months. “Yes, they were all drafted and submitted to the Executive Committee, but they probably got lost somewhere there [in the Gagauz Executive ],” Creangă commented.

Identifying those documents proved to be an impossible task. They are missing from the project’s Facebook page, and Creangă avoided providing them. We then tried to find out the fate of the 16 laws from representatives of the Executive Committee by sending them a request in April 2023. The Committee told us about only 10 of them, however: 5 are local laws, and 5 are rectifications of national laws.

The laws prepared by the experts were submitted to the Executive of Gagauzia, so formally the Executive Committee is the author of the initiatives. So far, only five of them have been examined. On 17 March 2023, the draft law On Public Finances was approved, but four others drafted by the SLPA working group were not approved by the Executive Committee until May 2023. They concerned war graves, libraries and museums.

The projects in question were presented at the Executive Committee meeting by Marina Semionova, Head of the Culture Directorate of ATU Gagauzia. “Round tables were held, discussions took place. Afterwards, there were finalizations. There were

legislative changes approved at the republican level; we have made changes here,” Semionova commented on the slow progress.

It took the Executive Committee almost three years from the day the SLPA project officially ended to approve the first draft laws developed under it, but for the drafts to enter into force, they have to be considered by the People’s Assembly of ATU Gagauzia, and so far, this has not happened.

## **FRAUD IN LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES**

Five other initiatives have been forwarded to Parliament in Chişinău representatives of the Executive Committee told us. Among them is the draft law On the Unitary System of Salaries in the Budget Sector, based on which it is planned to increase the salaries of some employees of the executive and legislative branches of the Gagauz Autonomy. Ion Creangă, the head of the working group that drafted the initiatives aimed at aligning the autonomy’s law with national law, says, however, that his team had nothing to do with this law. “These are other laws, not the ones we worked on. I would say that this is a whim of the Executive Committee, an institution that wants to increase the salaries of some employees in Gagauzia,” Ion Creangă says. The fate of the other six laws remains uncertain for now.

## **WHAT THE EU DELEGATION, THE FORMER BASHKAN AND THE FORMER PROJECT COORDINATOR THINK ABOUT THE PROJECT**

In response to RISE Moldova’s request, the European Union Delegation to Moldova assured us that, “The concrete objectives of the project have been largely achieved.” At the same time, the institution avoided commenting on possible deviations from the project’s spending plan citing a confidentiality clause in the contract.

In June 2023 in an interview for TV8, Irina Vlah, now former Bashkan, said that the project had been successfully completed; however, she added that she was not the one to answer more detailed questions: “First of all, I was not the one in charge of this project. Not the Executive Committee. There was a coordinator from the European

Union and there was a coordinator from the Executive Committee, Vadim Petrovici Ceban. I think that if you invite him to the studio, he will tell you everything in detail.” We were unable to get any further comment from Ms Vlah. The former Bashkan did not respond to our phone calls or to the message we left on her Facebook account.

Vadim Ceban, project coordinator until September 2019: “As far as I know, all the objectives of the infrastructure projects, of the small grants have been achieved. Here I am referring to the basic components of the budget. (...) As for what followed from 2019 to 2021, I think more can be reported to you by my colleagues on the Executive Committee.”

### **CRIMINAL CASE ON PROCUREMENT**

Since the completion of the SLPA project, the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office has become interested in the public procurement organized under it. On 15 July 2022, prosecutors searched the home of the employee responsible for organizing tenders under the project who was suspected of fraudulent procurement with the aim of procuring goods for the Executive Committee at a high price. A year after the raids, investigations into the case are continuing; the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office has refused to provide details.

### **TOTALS**

Over the last eight years, the European Union has been one of the most important international donors to ATU Gagauzia implementing projects worth more than 11 million euros in the autonomy. A survey conducted by IData in December 2022 showed, however, that the share of those supporting EU membership in ATU Gagauzia is one of the lowest among the regions of Moldova as only a third of the autonomy’s residents is in favour of European integration.

# LACK OF ASPHALT IN CODRU

FELICIA CREȚU,  
CU SENS MEDIA PROJECT, 4 April 2023

*“Road in progress: Completion date January 2023.” This is what the residents of three streets in the town of Codru, a suburb of Chișinău, have been reading on a billboard for almost three years. In April 2023 when we shot the above footage, the work was only half done. What is more, there was not even a trace of asphalt on some stretches. The street reconstruction project costing more than 50 million lei of public money seems to have stalled due to design problems, among others.*



One of the longest streets of Codru is called Livădarilor – it virtually crosses the town from one end to the other – but it fills up with mud on a rainy day. “There has been no road here for more than 24 years. As you can see, no road. We have to make do with mud. If you’re interested, I can give you some. I have to wash the mud off this gate every other day,” says Gheorghe Gavrilan, a resident of Codru.

“When you go to work, you’re embarrassed on the minibus. Your boots are dirty; you hide them. Or we carry a pack of wet wipes and wipe our footwear. As soon as we come home, ‘clean’ like that, we wash. We have no choice. This is the only way out to the minibus. That’s it,” Ana Luchianov, another resident, complains.

### **ROAD CONSTRUCTION STARTED THREE YEARS AGO**

For more than three years now, Livădarilor Street and two others nearby – Izvoarelor Street and an alley with the same name – have been under construction. More than 50 million lei were earmarked for asphaltting about four and a half kilometers of road, and the work should have been finished by January 2023. Local councilor Vadim Turcan, who is also Chairman of the Committee for Budget, Finance, Economy

and Reforms of Codru Town Council, showed us how things are going on the construction site. We drove from the end of Livadarilor Street.

“If we talk about the asphalt, you can see only this stretch, because other stretches, well, they are not there,” Turcan pointed out. After about half a kilometer, the asphalt ended and we started on a gravel road. “Basically, you see that the site is abandoned. There are building materials on the left and on the right that either have not been used or can no longer be used. The road is bumpy, you risk damaging your car, especially since there are manholes on the left and on the right that have been temporarily covered.”

After another kilometer we reached a stretch that looked like a country road. “On this stretch, only some preparation work has been done – some garbage disposal work and the storm drainage part – but as far as the road surface is concerned, practically nothing has been done. I would actually call this project a way or an example of how an infrastructure project of such complexity should not be implemented, and I’m referring to the fact that this project was not carried out to the end, was not completed on time and, respectively, shows faulty management in project implementation, both on the part of the contracting authority and the economic operator, i.e. the municipality and the construction company. This is very serious, because first of all the citizens of Codru suffer,” Turcan further explained.

The work on Izvoarelor Street has not been completed either. There is still one more layer of asphalt to be added. Izvoarelor Alley is parallel to it. Here, too, it’s a work in progress. Liubomir Chiriac has lived on this street for years. He is unhappy that the road has been narrowed as a result of the work. To convince us, he measures it: “It’s currently four meters and 50 cm. We had a road, it was gravel, but garbage collection could get through, the ambulance could get through, the fire brigade could get through. We had seven meters and something – any car could go through. Now we’re in a situation where we can’t do anything.”

## **NARROW ROAD, UNHAPPY RESIDENTS**

The neighbours are also unhappy. In February they sent a letter to the Town Hall and City Council asking for the work to be suspended. “We’re looking ahead to see what this whole project will end up



with, because we don't need such an impractical road," said Liubomir Chiriac, who is one of the signatories.

Construction specialist Mihai Busuioc was hired by Codru Town Hall to check the quality and amount of work over the course of the entire project. When he arrived, he was chided by locals. "What kind of project have you done, if this project is one and a half meters on one side and one and a half meters on the other side? Who needs three meters? For us, to have our garbage collected... no car can get through," Ion Trofim complained.

"The designer said that was the norm. A car shouldn't be kept on the road," Mihai Busuioc answered. Asked why the work has been delayed, Busuioc said it was because of price increases and additional work that had come up in the meantime.

We went to Codru Town Hall for more details. Mayor Vladimir Munteanu agreed to give us an interview only if an employee was filming simultaneously: "I'll give you an interview when I turn on my camera so you don't take what I'm going to talk about out of context," the Mayor cautioned.

## **MISTAKES IN DESIGN**

Mayor Munteanu:

This street is a problematic one because it has never been under construction or repaired. Many obstacles have been encountered – additional work and increased prices – so the town council made a decision to analyze the proposals of the business operator to increase the price and for the additional work very carefully. The designer of this project made many mistakes, and so that public money is not wasted in vain, because we are responsible for public money, we are doing everything possible to extend this work in accordance with the legislation in force. People must understand and the council must be responsible for what the local government has started: to take this construction, this road to the end, to have it made to the end. However, any additional work must be voted on by the council. Any money must be voted on by the council.

Luxgaz SRL is the company that three years ago won the

multi-million lei tender to lay asphalt on the three streets. In fact, the contract was not won outright. Initially, Codru Town Hall rejected its bid and cancelled the tender. Luxgaz SRL, however, challenged the decision at the National Agency for the Settlement of Disputes (NASD) which found that, “The rejection of the tender is unfounded simply because some details are missing, (...) and the actions of the contracting authority represent excessive formalism.” The local government was thus required to re-evaluate the bid.

“We have already organized this procurement procedure several times, and even though we opted for cancellation, since we have a decision from NASD we to a certain extent were required to have a winner for this tender,” according to Mihaela Tăriță, procurement specialist at Codru Town Hall.

The work got off to a bad start because, as the mayor admitted, many mistakes were made at the design stage. For example, 300 manhole covers were not foreseen. Alexei Pleșca, the administrator and co-founder of Luxgaz SRL explained: “So if you simply multiply by 3,000 lei per cover, you have one million lei more in costs in covers alone. And such omissions are many. I’ve never come across such a situation, so many changes in a project. The municipality should have submitted an amended design that would have provided for all the omissions because I am not obliged to compensate for the designer’s omissions from my own budget.”

Contractor Pleșca claims that the company that did the design work – on the basis of which he now has to build the road – did not react promptly when additional tasks appeared:

They tergiversated for a year with this design during which time changes were not made to the execution documentation either, so we effectively waited for a year in vain. We are a private institution, a private company; our primary interest is to execute as much work as possible as quickly as possible so that we can get another contract, so that we have turnover. The beneficiary did not provide us with working conditions; we have not yet seen a final design on the table, telling us, ‘Guys, this is how we work, this is how we do the work.’ So how can we increase the pace, speed up the work if we don’t know how?

**DESIGNER CANNOT BE FOUND**

The company that designed the project was the Iprocom State Design Institute. It is located in several offices in a state-owned building in Chişinău, but we did not find anyone in the office. We learned from the building's security guard that we were not the only ones looking for the people in charge of Iprocom. The building manager alleged the company no longer operated at that address and had accumulated rent debts. We have not been able to speak with any representative of Iprocom although we have tried repeatedly to contact them by telephone. Instead, we learned from the procurement officer of Codru Town Hall that in 2021 the local government hired another business specializing in design work: the sole proprietorship Curaj-Boşcăneanu managed by Fiodor Boşcăneanu, former chief engineer of Iprocom. He is responsible for supervising and adjusting the execution of the project if additional work is required.

Fiodor Boşcăneanu told us, "The problem isn't with me, the problem is that prices have changed, additional work has appeared. That's the problem. All the changes have been made. The changes were given to the municipality in December. The contractor can execute them, the municipality only needs to verify them. All those changes have to pass verification."

Procurement specialist Tăriţă, on the other hand, says that Town Hall is just about to receive all the documents, "We are now in the process of getting the designer to bring in all the changes, the list of quantities recorded in the fact-finding acts. Town Hall will afterwards send them to the contractor so that the latter can submit a bid, i.e., how much the work will cost from its point of view, I mean the additional work that was not initially foreseen."

Therefore, in addition to the more than 50 million lei foreseen for this street construction project, millions more will be needed for additional work. The increase in the amount of the contract must, however, be approved by the local council. So far, the municipality has not put such a request on the table. Councilor Vadim Turcan explained:

We discussed it at the meeting, but we discussed it verbally. Basically, we weren't presented with any documents to use as a basis for discussion. On the other hand, we had allocated money that was

not used. It doesn't say 'additional work' or 'basic work' there [in the allocation]. It says 'for the project,' i.e., 'good management of the site,' respectively. The money is still to be used. The contractor made some requests, and we told him each time that the money was there, so the problem is to have the project implemented.

In the meantime, the town council has concluded an agreement with the contractor to extend the work for another year, but while the contractors and authorities continue to play ping pong with allegations and responsibilities, the residents of Codru are the losers.



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Godfather, and a District Councilor and  
Businessman Who Wins Million-Dollar  
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Prosecutor's Office:  
How 1.8 Million Lei Were Spent  
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Database***



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Kolkhoz Demise: The Case of Baraboi,  
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on European Money***



***Road Repair in Buda, Călăraşi:  
The Kindergarten Road is Cracking  
and Crumbling while the Mayor's and  
Councilor's are Thick and Durable***



***Lack of Asphalt in Codru***

2023

BLACK BOOK OF PUBLIC MONEY WASTE IN REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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