

Concept Note - Polarization In The Eastern European Neighbourhood

Moldova session (online)

Thursday 13 July, 12:00 – 14:00 CEST

Introduction & goals

This in-depth, 2 hour session will bring together country and content specialists to consider how the war in Ukraine has impacted polarization in Moldova, particularly regarding issues of democracy and rule of law, and how the social contract may offer a lens for renewed responses.

The three concrete aims of the session are to:

1. Pinpoint the impact the conflict in Ukraine has on polarization in the country, particularly relating to issues of democracy and rule of law.
2. Analyze polarization dynamics in Moldova through the lens of the social contract.
3. Identify areas of interest for mitigation of polarization for the international community.

During the session the following broad questions will be covered:

- What mechanisms are currently impacting polarization?
- Why is it a problem? How does polarization explicitly affect issues of democracy and rule of law? (For example, does it affect the relationship between the state and its citizens, does it impact inclusive politics, or open government?)
- How can the lens of the social contract (or aspects thereof) be applied to identify entry points for responses to the issues identified?

The webinar session's participants are a combination of targeted invitation and limited spots for a wider audience, with a strong focus on discussion and interaction.

Agenda

Time	Session	Speaker
12:00 – 12:05	Welcome & summary trajectory	Amy Eaglestone
12:05 – 12:10	Introduction speakers	
12:10 – 12:20	Applying the 'social contract frame' to polarization	Christian Kuitert (KPSRL)
12:20 – 12:35	Setting the scene I: polarization in Moldova	Dorin Chirtoacă (leader Liberal Party, ex-mayor Chişinău)
12:35 – 12:50	Setting the scene II: polarization in Moldova	Inna Şupac (AIA-NRW, ex-MP Party of Communists)
12:50 – 13:00	Clarifying questions	
13:00 – 13:05	Reflections from the 'social contract' perspective	Christian Kuitert (KPSRL)
13:05 – 13:50	Main discussion	
13:50 – 13:55	Extracted recommendations	Amy Eaglestone
13:55 – 14:00	Closing	Christian Kuitert (KPSRL)

Broader trajectory

This session is part of a broader learning trajectory ‘Addressing Polarization in the Eastern European Neighbourhood from a Social Contract Perspective’, hosted by the Knowledge Platform Security Rule of Law (KPSRL) in the Hague. Its goal is to develop and disseminate knowledge regarding the impact of the war in Ukraine on polarization in the region and how a social contracts framework may help in identifying possible responses.

The end goal of the project is to inform EU-level policy and programming related to support for rule of law and democracy in the Eastern European region. As with Moldova, there was a country case session about the case of Georgia. Then lastly, a round table will take place with policy makers to draw out broader lessons. The project will culminate in a policy paper to be published in late 2023 and presented at the KPSRL annual conference.

Timeline learning trajectory

June	July	August	September
<i>Input phase</i>		<i>Reflection phase</i>	<i>Uptake phase</i>
Country case: Georgia	Country case: Moldova	Writing discussion paper	Roundtable: Policy makers

Social contract concept:

The social contract is the process by which a political community, either explicitly or tacitly, consents to a governing authority, thereby limiting some of her or his freedoms, in exchange for 1) protection of their universal human rights and security and 2) for the adequate provision of public goods and services, as well as in many cases 3) the inclusion of society in political decision making. Social contracts depend on the capacities and legitimacy of public institutions and the interplay of economic and political forces.

In general, sustainably strengthening a social contract entails three elements: a) Promoting responsive public institutions at both national and local levels; b) Supporting inclusive politics, based on transparent and predictable mechanisms that include and engage individuals or social groupings commonly marginalized or wholly excluded from political life; and c) Fostering resilient societies, chiefly by promoting robust state–society and society–society relations.

Democracy and Rule of law:

Democracy and rule of law is about the promotion by the government of democratic principles and citizens’ rights through the upholding of, inclusive and transparent institutions, so that the government is accountable under the law, and the processes by which the law is adopted and enforced are accessible and fair.

Polarization makes political decision-making more difficult due to a loss of common ground and dismissal of 'the other', which is fertile ground for less inclusive and anti-democratic solutions. Populists and authoritarians often happily feed polarization to push their anti-democratic agendas by undermining political decision making processes through their influence over the judiciary, the media, and civil society for instance. This can lead to a weakening of the rule of law, as the checks and balances supposed to keep those in power accountable are eroded. When democratic institutions are weakened, politicians can abuse their power and infringe on citizens’ rights. When politicians prioritize their interests or those of a particular group over democracy’s broader principles, they erode citizens’ trust in the democratic process. This can lead to a breakdown in social cohesion, as different groups feel that their voices are not being heard and their interests are not being represented.