

## MOLDOVA: The Wait and Ways to Beat It

Written by OCCRP

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*Serghei Ivanenco, arrested for counterfeiting Romanian identity documents. --Courtesy Moldavian Ministry of Domestic Affairs.*

Moldovans seeking to move to the Schengen area have one tool that many others do not—they can ask to claim citizenship of Romania, a process officially called “regaining of citizenship,” because the people share a language and once shared mutual territory. That citizenship would guarantee them a Romanian passport and membership in the EU, which would allow them to move freely throughout EU countries.

That tool, though, is not an easy one to use, and it is heavily abused. Since 1999, according to a comparison of records and sources, as many as a million Moldovan citizens—one fourth of the country’s population—immigrated, mostly illegally, to European Union countries. National and international organizations figure that anywhere from 600,000 to a million Moldavans work abroad, but the Moldova National Bureau of Statistics’ lists the official number as 350,000.

Since 2007, when Romania was granted membership to the EU, the forgery of Romanian passports and ID cards became a lucrative business, say Moldovan experts.

The reason to turn to forgers is that they can turn a complicated procedure that can last five years or so into a three-week experience. Grigore Burciu is one who has adhered to the law,

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and although he applied for Romanian citizenship in 2004, he is still registered as a Moldovan and still lives in Chisinau.

“Since 2008, I haven’t had any news from the Consulate,” Burciu said. “I will probably receive Romanian citizenship at the end of the year, so now I’m waiting. What else can I do?”

### Using a “Mediator” Firm



*A counterfeiter arrested by Moldavian police in July 2009. --Courtesy Moldavian Ministry of Domestic Affairs*

Vasile, 28, has his answer to those questions. From Truseni village, he got to Italy two years ago, using a tourist visa issued by a “mediator” firm. When the visa expired, he stayed in Italy and has worked illegally in construction in Rome since. “I paid €2,000 for the visa,” said Vasile, who asked that his last name not be used. “The mediators turned me overnight into a truck driver in a private company. They perfected a fake driver’s license, which was also submitted to the Consulate. I paid them the money when I saw the visa in my passport; after a few days I was in Italy.”

That route is commonly followed, said Ghenadie Podsevalov, formerly the head of a department of the Ministry of Domestic Affairs, involved in fighting organized crime and familiar with the problem. Podsevalov now works as a private detective. He said the Schengen tourist visa

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business blossomed in Moldova from 1996 to 2006, with many tourist companies sending Moldovans to work in the EU and not on holiday as they pretended. “They used to find their clients through Makler newspapers,” Podsevalov said. “At the beginning, the mediators worked with EU embassies, but as soon as Chisinau was forced to adhere to EU policies, tourist companies moved to Kiev...It was such companies that helped hundreds of thousands of people reach the EU and never return home.”

### Donor Pressures Trigger Change

He said pressure on Moldova from foreign aid donors practically shut down many mediator companies, although he said he thinks that those who remained in business were excellent forgers or enjoyed protection from state officials. “Should police want,” Podsevalov said, “they could throw such racketeers in prison.”



*Forged Romanian IDs supposedly issued in Chisinau. --Courtesy Moldavian Ministry of Domestic Affairs*

Things may be changing, though, even for those who have remained, Podsevalov said. In October, a notice appeared on the web page of the Schengen Visa Application Centre, saying that faked supporting documents were on the rise and the embassies will deal with the abusive

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practice with a thorough verification of documents, possibly “with the help of Moldovan authorities.”

Probably, Podsevalov said, “this is the beginning of the end for go-between mediators.”

If that happens, it could mean an end to the advertisements of “Schengen visa help” in the Makler newspapers that Podsevalov mentioned. But how do mediators get somebody through and how much does it cost for their services?

A call to a phone listed in the newspaper was answered by a woman, who asked, “Is it your first trip to the Schengen area?” To the answer, yes, she said, “A ten-day tourist’s visa costs €2,000. You pay the money after you receive the passport with the visa included. And you do not have to pay advance money. As a rule, the procedure lasts for one month. Do not worry; you will receive a valid visa. You will be able to enter Italy. Further on, it’s your business whether you come back or not.”

### **Using Kiev**

Questioned further, she said only an ID card and passport were needed. “We’ll take care of the rest of the documents,” she said. “...You will have to go to the Kiev Consulate for an interview. But there is no need to worry. We shall teach you how to speak properly.”



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