

Sinteze și Dezbateri de Politică Externă

Forum UE- Moldova, 04.05.2011

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Discussion Panel: Geopolitics and its implications for Moldova. Chisinau between Moscow, Brussels and Washington

Moderator:

Vitaly Portnikov, Editor-in-Chief, TVi channel, Ukraine

Speakers:

Oleksandr Chalyi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Ukraine

Grigory Trofimchuk, First Vice-President, Center for Modelling of Strategic Development, Russia

Vladimir Socor, Expert, Jamestown Foundation, USA

Iulian Fruntasu, Adviser to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova

Commentators:

Ivan Mikhayluk, Deputy Chief of Staff, Committee on CIS, State Duma, Russia

Natalia Morar, Journalist, Politician, Republic of Moldova

Transcript

Vitaly Portnikov: Speech in Russian

Grigory Trofimchuk: Speech in Russian

Vladimir SOCOR: I will focus on Moldova rather than on the region because US relations to Ukraine and to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe and to Russia are constantly being discussed. There is a lot of information in the public domain about it, but as regards Moldova it remains rather an obscure corner in this debate because there is little knowledge about history and about current developments affecting the geopolitics of Moldova. Geopolitics smiles on Moldova today for the first time in Moldova's history. Europe has become contiguous to Moldova direct neighbor and Russia is in the far distance. This is a happy situation in a long and unhappy geopolitical history of Moldova. If you walk through the city of Krakow you get the sense of lost opportunity for Moldova. When you see the coat of arms of Moldova on the royal buildings in Krakow including the Jagiellonian University and other buildings symbolizing royal authority and the royal splendor of medieval Poland, Moldova could have become attached to this European monarchy and major power in the middle ages, but the chance was lost and we have what we have today. I have listed six issues for this presentation. The issue of location, Europe, Russia, identity, sphere of influence and border. These are the issues I want to touch upon.

Moldova's location from a geopolitical standpoint is that of a permanent border land, a passive object of disputes among other parties over or in this territory. In the European state system other states or formations, state formations, sub-state entities were traditionally able to take advantage of such situations and to convert the risks into opportunities playing of neighbor's against each other or conducting a policy of balance. Moldova did not do so because Moldova did not have a state, properly speaking and that

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happened because Moldova lacked a structured society. There was no organized state here, there was the territory and the population unable to convert risks into opportunity, unable to play balance, there was no one to play balance. Yet, there was a potential advantage in Moldova situation under ottoman rule from the early sixteenth till late eighteenth century. The potential advantage was the location of Moldova far away from the Turkish road to Vienna. Moldova was of little, if any geopolitical interest to the Ottoman port. So, a competent society, a structured political class would have been able to build on it. It never happened. Compare Moldova's situation to the situation of the Principality of Transylvania. Transylvania was much closer to the Ottoman road to Vienna, therefore the high interest for the Ottoman port, but Transylvania was a highly organized society, the principality. It inherited the institutions of medieval Hungary, it had a Prince, a Parliament, it had constitutional Laws and a deeply rutted constitutional consciousness among the ruling classes a strong administrative organization in counties, a strong military organization, three cities and a well founded military, Transylvania, very close to here; none of that in Moldova therefore no possibility to bargain with a Port for a real autonomy.

Following the retreat of the Ottoman Empire, the territory of present Moldova ended up on the Russian road of expansion in the direction of Constantinople. That turned Moldova in a major strategic interest of Russia and the result was a long series of Russian invasions of Moldova's territory, culminating by the annexation of Moldova by Tsarist Russia in 1812. Between 1812 and 1914/1917 there was no alternative for this territory but to be a province of Russian Empire, a situation that we can describe with a Russian word which is merciless as the Russian rule itself (bez alternativnosti). Such was the location of Moldova that here was no alternative inside.

From the issue of location let me move on to the issue of Europe. The impact of Europe on Moldova, culturally and geopolitically was a negligible impact of 600 years of history. Europe was not contiguous to Moldova. Unaware of this history, some people in 1989 were saying there are four Baltic republics, the three and Moldova. After that in '89 we expected synchronic development of the Baltic States and Moldova. How naïve if you think about historic antecedents. The territory of the present Baltic States, I am especially referring to the territory of the present Estonia and Latvia had an aristocracy, a German aristocracy with roots in that territory of almost one thousand years of continuity, with a strong sense of social mission as organizers of local society, you had highly developed towns, the Lutheran religion, close ties to Universities in Germany, organic links with the Hanseatic League and the direct neighborhood of the Kingdom of Sweden and Denmark. Compare this with Moldova. We had the Ottoman Empire, the corrupt Greek - Orthodox Church and the Patriarchy of Constantinople and instead of a responsible aristocracy we had an improvised class of land owners recruited from among Fanariot Greeks with no organic ties to this country no sense of mission and we had a political ethics here that to this day is described with the term Byzantine. This too is a part of the heritage and this also explains, at least in part, the high, unrealistic hope of establishing democracy over night in today's Moldova given such a heritage.

Europe made a geopolitical impact on Moldova only occasionally and very late, and for brief moments. One such moment was the Crimea war, when in 1953-1856 the powers from Western Europe intervened



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against Russia and defeated it. That brief moment, without any follow-up, had nevertheless the effect of detaching three countries from Russian ruled Bessarabia and uniting those three countries to the other part of Moldova under nominal Ottoman rule. It had the effect of internationalizing the Danube question and it created, if not in Bessarabia, at least close to it, including the three Bessarabia countries European protectorate which only lasted until the Congress of Berlin in 1878 when thing returned to the normal “bezalternativnosti”. Then, Europe made again a geopolitical impact on the R. of Moldova for two brief moments, in the two World Wars through Germany and the moment the alternative appeared you could see the effect for those brief moments. It was thanks to the German victory in the First World War that Bessarabia was able to detach itself from Russia. And, by the way, I thinking about Poland, Krakow, Krinitsa, when my Polish host gave me a ride from Krakow to Krinitsa you see the River San, it was on the River San in 1915 that the German and Austrian army broke the back of Russian Tsarist army and set the stage, irreversibly for what was going to happen from the Baltic States to Moldova in 1917, 1918, the collapse of Tsarist Russia. And then, the nest moment of geopolitical impact of Europe 1941 when the territory of Bessarabia occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940 could be liberated from Soviet rule in 1941, again thanks to the processes of flux that the Second World War set in. Then again, back to “bezalternativnosti” in 1944 until 1991.

My third point Russia. I juttet here the list of Russian invasions of the territory of the present day Moldova and of Moldova west to the River Prut of the present day Romania. The Russian invasions occurred in 1711, 1739, 1768-1774, 1787-1791, 1806-1812, 1827-1829, 1848, 1853-1854, first stage of Crimea War, 1877-18778, 1914-1917, 1940-1941 and from 1944-1991. The present territory of Moldova, both sides of the River Prut, of Romania as well, was in the way of these constant Russian invasions, geopolitical flood that prevented any development of independent statehood, of local institutions, of local society and which excluded any kind of Europeanization even if Europe had been closer geographically. That is why I said at the beginning that the geopolitical history of Moldova is such a sad one.

My fourth point has to do with identity, national identity. Local population between the Prut and the Nistru and eastern of the Nistru River never underwent a process of national development, the modern sense, was never a part of national reviver that occurred in Europe from the late eighteen century till the late nineteenth and even the first part of the twentieth century. The local population here was never part of that process. West of the Prut River, the Moldovans there along with other Romanians did undergo this process starting after the Russian annexation of Bessarabia in 1812. The separation of Bessarabia from the rest of Romanian speaking population had the effect of isolating Bessarabia and of paralyzing the development of national identity here. The local population here never advanced, not to this day, never advanced from a fake consciousness to a consciousness of a modern nation. That is why till the present day you have this tension between Moldovan consciousness and Romanian consciousness. The situation is sadly similar to that in Belarus where the majority of the local population in the country side but also in the cities describe themselves as people from here, again a fake consciousness in a pre-national state, stuck in a pre-national state.

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In Moldova between the Prut and Nistru and east of the Nistru this results to this day in unnecessary tensions partly because few carriers of the Romanian identity do not often understand the reason why the majority of their fellow citizens cannot make that identification. Of course, Romania itself as a state helped very little in this regard showing little understanding for the non-synchronous development of Romanian speaking people here and Romanian speaking people to the west. One result of this non-synchronous development was the linguistic and cultural russification of the local population of Bessarabia and of Transnistria even more. The Russian empire building project through the spread of the Russian language easily defeated the competing “Moldovan language”. Russian held social prestige, the Moldovan language and culture could not hold their own, they there not a viable competitor to the massive Russian culture and the cultural impact of Russia.

Had Romanian culture been able to penetrate across the Prut River? It might probably provide some competition to Russian civilization but the local dialect and the local culture was totally outclassed. Modernization, urbanization and even a model of European culture came to Bessarabia and to the Soviet Moldova also, not from the West but from the East with the intermediation of Russia. Romania was not able to act as an agent of Europeanization in Bessarabia, partly because of isolation but also partly because of Romania’s own weaknesses as a state and society. So, in a rather perverse way, European influence during the 19th century came not from the West but from the East via Russia. There are many symbols of this and of the many symbols I will list just one. The long time Mayer of Chisinau, he served as a Mayer of Chisinau for about 30 years id not 40 years, Mr. Schmidt who was an ardent supporter of Russian Tsarism and who was Mayer until 1917 and who went at the peace Congress at Versailles in 1919 to lobby for Russia “edinaia I nedelimaia” and Bessarabia to remain a part of it. That is just one example of many that could be given, but the pattern continued again, in some pervert way, during soviet times when modernization, urbanization, industrialization, education, all came from the east not from the West carried by Russian speakers imported from the interior of Russia into Moldova. Of course, Soviet authorities made that possible by Soviet Moldova and prior to that Bessarabia, from the rest of Europe and by making it a part of the Russian imperial project.

My point number five: spheres of influence. It was the history of Moldovan geopolitics to condemn Moldova to become somebody’s outright possession or sphere of influence. There are three possible roles for a territory in this context. A territory could be somebody else’s outpost, serving as an offensive spring board; it can be somebody else’s buffer serving to avoid conflict between powerful neighbors, situated in between them and serving to avoid conflict between them or battle field which is self explanatory, being a battle field between neighbors, great powers. During most of its history, Moldova was one or the other, either somebody’s outpost or somebody’s buffer or bottle field between somebody else. So, the history as I outlined it is self explanatory in this regard, but we have heard the most recent version of this pattern of development after soviet times and this most recent version is called peacekeeping and it is the de facto monopoly of Russia in terms of peacekeeping in Moldova and in other former soviet territories. Since 1992 Russia has sought Western recognition of a Russian peacekeeping monopoly on the former soviet territory. That recognition was never forthcoming; it never occurred, what has occurred is de facto consent, silent acceptance by the West of the Russian peacekeeping monopoly over the former soviet

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territories and with this begins the building of the spheres of influence. This is a building block towards spheres of influence building. Only now this monopoly is being challenged but it has been allowed to become entrenched for about 15 years. Now EU is finally challenging it seriously, the USA does not, the EU does. The result is de facto partition of Moldova. The sphere of influence concept has crystallized not only on paper through peacekeeping but on the ground through a de facto demarcation line and partition of the country not as advanced as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia but in a less advanced state than there.

Finally my sixth point has to do with Moldova's Eastern Border. I have made an arithmetical count and I found that during more than 600 years of history Transnistria was never separated from the rest of Moldova by a border. The only time in Moldova's entire history when Transnistria was separated by a border was 1791 until 1806 when the Russian empire had a next Transnistria, but had not yet a next Bessarabia, in 1919-1940 when Bessarabia was part of Romania. Except for these 36 years totally there was never a border between Bessarabia and Transnistria. Ironically enough, if you stood at Soroca and looked over the Nistru River, what territory was that legally? It was the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth legally. In fact, it was a no men's land constantly raided by Kazaks and Tatars but a completely unguarded border. And this was the case for the late 14th century until today practically with the exception of those 36 years. So, what do we conclude from here, we conclude that the existing separation of Transnistria from Bessarabia is a completely unnatural situation. The Transnistrian authorities from Tiraspol have the intension of drawing a border, an impossible border between the two part of Moldova and that is up to us with the historical knowledge of the local culture to enlighten our western friends in the EU about the unnaturalness of the separation of Transnistria from Moldova. I will stop here for the moment, thank you!

Iulian FRUNTAȘU: Well thank you! First of all I would like to emphasize that I am here in my personal capacity and not as advisor at the Prime Minister. Obviously, the political elite is conscious and fully aware of its responsibility because we base, I could speak perhaps in my political capacities, we speak about our policies on what people of Moldova want and European integration is obviously one of the first priority of this country. I am not an expert on geopolitics, I have to admit, sometimes it feels like we guess looking at stars, but I have to admit that I like the comparison that our speaker has made, a rather poetic about Moldova being an asteroid and our neighbors being planets and galaxies.

I don't know what Moldova is in this comparison but the direction is important. The direction we move is Brussels basically and this is a strategic decision taken by Moldovan elite and not just by Moldovan elite unilaterally but, as I said early is based on what Moldovan citizens want. I also want to come back a little bit on what our last speaker was saying about the identity which is a rather long historical kind of debate. It is true that both identity and the statehood is not that strong as we would like this identity to be but, otherwise I would like to say that R. of Moldova is a project under construction and the statehood is something that we can build and we do build. The identity as well, by the way, in history there are two groups that advocate to different views about identity. One is called primordialists that say that we are born in identities that we can change; basically you are born in a family, into a culture, into a nation, into

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a state. The other one, constructivists say that everything is an artifact; we can build from scratch everything.

Between these two extremes I would rather favor the last one. I think that we are capable to start something from the scratch and our very existence is a proof that we are successful and we will achieve a certain degree of stability and prosperity as well. The nation state itself is a notion that belongs to the past. And here European integration comes in very conveniently because we can replace the idea of nation state with EU as such. So, it is not just an object of foreign policy, it is not just an aim of the foreign policy but it's also something that belongs and will belong to what we will build from the scratch, as an identity as part of the identity of the R. of Moldova is this European road. Indeed, Moldova is not that well known in the world, in Europe increasingly so.

Putting Moldova on the map is an important task. Our diplomacy proved to be very successful last couple of years in handling the situation. We had lots of delegations and high level guests coming here and going beyond all documents and negotiations and everything what is important is that this people and these officials see Moldova on the map. Starting this process is important because when people know where Moldova is they feel connected to this part of the world and their projects come, ideas come, human contact and others. Again, diplomacy has done a good job and we will continue this way. I remember for instance, the visit of Baroness Catherine Ashton here I think a month ago and she was telling us that she knows articles from our Constitution by heart which is kind of interesting thing, high official of the EU to know the Constitution of a small country in the neighborhood. I don't know how we managed to attract this attention but we will capitalize on that skillfully. It is important also to deliver results in internal reforms indeed because diplomacy can deliver to a certain extent the attention, all the agreements and everything but what is important as well is that we, through our policies here in Moldova deliver concrete results then it comes to reforms, justice system in particular and obviously rise the living standards in this country.

Speaking about the incentives that are mentioned at this particular panel like Washington, Brussels and Moscow I would say that the current affairs are pretty interesting in the world because is not that much very clear leadership of a particular country. The US, I think has taken rather humble role in the latest event in Libya though it is also true that out of all this missiles fired against Libya 99% were Americans and not European but, at least in diplomatic terms it looks like the Europeans are also very active. This is good because Europe seems to be more responsible for border lands as, Mr. Socor also mentioned, and the road Europe has made from 10, 15 years ago is amazing. We have EUBAM here; we have policies that EU is developing regarding its neighborhood.

It is true that, however, financial crises is something that will make Europeans humble as well because the trouble the single currency is going through I think will give some weight to some populist political movements in Europe be it on the left or on the right. It is true that Moldova has taken this road. We will make this trip; we know the end station Brussels but we don't know how this end station will look like in

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several years when we will arrive to this station. EU is in a very fluid situation now. Financial crises can obviously open some opportunities for a stronger Europe. Any crises can open opportunities but sometimes I am afraid that populism of the right and left will take more power in the EU countries. Looking at all these models I think that EU is a priority. Indeed we look around and see Beijing as well, we see Asian Countries dexterous in developing and implementing policies but honestly speaking we can't afford ourselves any sort of fancy game this anything that is out of the border of Europe because the geographical proximity, in a way, decides and the attraction of Europe is very big. I think this will be the shortest intervention from my side because we run out of time but I will be happy to take questions.

Institutul de Studii Estice din Varșovia în parteneriat cu Asociația pentru Politică Externă din Moldova a organizat în perioada 29 – 31 martie 2011 Forumul Economic Uniunea Europeană – Moldova sub patronajul domnilor Vlad Filat, Primului Ministru al Republicii Moldova și Donald Tusk, Primul Ministru al Poloniei. Primul Forum UE – Moldova a servit drept un cadru pentru schimb de idei, experiență și discuții privind posibile colaborări pe viitor.