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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The materials are realized by Lina Grau, foreign policy expert and programme coordinator with APE.

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The last period has been marked by several important events in Moldova.



President Nicolae Timofti reiterated in a speech at the South-East European Cooperation Process Summit (SEEC) the importance of maintaining stability in the region and said that Moldova would capitalize on the political association with the EU by strengthening the institutional legal framework, economic growth and its contribution to the regional security. The final Summit Declaration states that the EU enlargement and the offering of European and Euro Atlantic perspective to the countries which take this course represent a common strategic interest to both the EU and Southeast European countries.



The Broadcasting Coordinating Council decided on Wednesday, June 28, to suspend the broadcasting in Moldova of the Russian Russia 24 TV station for an indefinite period of time and fined other four Moldovan TV stations re-broadcasting Russian TV channels for failure to ensure fairness and balance in rebroadcasting news and analytical programs. The Communist Party condemned the decision, saying that the suspension of the rebroadcasting of the Russia 24 TV station "violates the freedom of expression".



On June 29th, the Prime Minister Chirilă Gaburici had his first bilateral meeting with his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, within the CIS summit in Kazakhstan. "The European vector is not a choice against Russia. The economic areas are compatible and the cooperation in this regard is beneficial to both countries," said Gaburici quoted by a Government press release. Chirilă Gaburici thanked his Russian counterpart for "steps taken to resume exports of agricultural products for some Moldovan companies."



The Ukrainian President, Petro Poroshenko, appointed Mikhail Saakashvili, ex-president of Georgia, governor of Odessa region after having granted him the citizenship of Ukraine. The decision was criticized by the Tiraspol authorities which said that was another step towards total blockage by Ukraine and Moldova of the Transnistrian region faced with an unprecedented economic crisis. The Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Dmitry Rogozin, brought the same accusations ensuring at the same time that Russia will not abandon the Transnistrian residents.



At the same time, the Ukrainian media is reporting about Ukrainian troops concentrating on the border with Transnistria. The head of the Ukrainian border guard service, Viktor Nazarenko, maintains there exist military and technological threats coming from Transnistria.



Several polls suggest that the position of mayor will be resolved in the runoff between the current liberal mayor, Dorin Chirtoacă, and the socialist Zinaida Grecianii, who led two governments in the former communist government. The local elections from June 14th can bring surprises in Orhei, where the main suspect in the embezzlement of one billion euros from the banking system of the Republic of Moldova, Ilan Șor, got registered as a candidate for mayor. Meanwhile, the Balti Municipal Council announced its intention to hold a referendum on November 1st on the expansion of local autonomy. The Prime Minister Chirilă Gaburici announced he will challenge this decision in the Constitutional Court.

EU Eastern Neighbourhood – where to?



The Final Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Riga Summit says in paragraph 7 that the participants "are

aware of the European aspirations and the European choice made by Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine." The statement



The European Commissioner for the Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement, Johannes Hahn, suggested that Moldova could be ready to apply for EU membership in a few years. Speaking in Brussels on Thursday, June 28th, at a conference on the results of the Riga Summit in Riga, Hahn said "the new Moldovan government" could be persuaded to accept a preparation programme that could lead to the application when the country is ready, maybe at the end of the government "period."

also condemns the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, a point treated with reserve by Armenia and Belarus.

The text of the Declaration was negotiated with difficulty on the eve of the summit, an aspect which made the critics of the Eastern Partnership say that the Summit marked the failure of the EU EaP initiative and of the European course of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. The foreign policy experts in Chisinau do not share this view considering it a positive result as given the pressure in the region put by Russia, the Riga Summit Declaration maintains the European perspective for the countries which signed Association Agreements with the EU.

Opening the Summit in Riga on 21-22 May, the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, said the summit "is not about extension," but "we must ensure that each country has a European perspective".

The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, said the European Union's partnership with the six eastern European countries is even more important given the crisis in Ukraine. Speaking in the Bundestag, Merkel said that the European order has been shaken by the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia and the fighting in eastern Ukraine. "We will continue to support our eastern neighbours that try to create democratic societies based on the rule of law." Commenting on the fears that the Eastern Partnership could cause a deep rivalry between the EU and Russia, Merkel repeated that the "Eastern Partnership is not an EU enlargement tool. Therefore we should not give rise to expectations that we will not be able to meet".

Victor Chirilă: Moldova has benefited greatly from the EU offers coming through the Eastern Partnership



Victor Chirila, Executive Director of the Foreign Policy Association said the results of the Riga Eastern Partnership Summit are very good for Moldova's European perspective, especially in the context of the regional situation. The European course depends now on the quality of the Moldovan political class, but also on the civic spirit of the Moldovan society and on how it will understand to get involved and ask for continuation of the European reforms.

■ **Lina Grău:** The Riga Eastern Partnership Summit is considered a failure by some Moldovan commentators, while others are of the opinion that the summit achieved its purpose since the final Declaration contains references to the European perspective of the three Eastern Partnership countries which signed Association Agreements with the EU –

the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. What is your opinion about this?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** From my point of view, the summit hasn't been a failure for Moldova. Moldova has achieved everything it wanted and what the Eastern Partnership has offered- we have signed an Association Agreement, including a Free Trade Agreement, with the EU, which we have started implementing and we have also obtained a visa liberalization regime with the EU. Due to the Association Agreement we've got for the first time the economic integration perspective with the EU, which, in my view, once implemented, will certainly pave the way for the political integration of our country.

Therefore, the Eastern Partnership is in no way a failure. Neither the Riga Summit is a failure, because the final Summit Declaration recognizes our European aspirations and choice. Now, it is our duty to take advantage of the EU openness and put the Association Agreement into practice - this is essential for us. And when we prove that we really are - not just through statements - involved, committed and determined to do the necessary reforms and thus meet the EU accession criteria, the European Union will find it very difficult to refuse our membership application.

So, we have to be realistic and stay optimistic and if there is political will,

we will be able to move on to another stage in the development of our relations with the EU.

It is a failure only for those who had exaggerated and had unrealistic expectations from the Riga Summit and also for those who have always criticized the Eastern Partnership initiative, questioning its ability to help us in getting closer to the EU.

As for me, I admit that there exist problems and I recognize the weaknesses of the Eastern Partnership. One of the weaknesses is that it doesn't give us a clear EU membership perspective. At the same time, I am optimistic because, on the other hand, the Eastern Partnership gives us opportunities that once exploited, will bring us the much expected results.

■ **Lina Grâu:** How do you estimate the time needed for Moldova to fully benefit from the EU offers or when will it be ready economically, socially, and politically to join the EU?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** First, we should focus on meeting all the criteria - economic, political, institutional and democratic – demanded by the EU from any European country which wants to become an EU member. It is therefore difficult to make a prediction now when Moldova will be ready and how long this process will take. It may take 5 years as well as 10 years. It all depends on our determination and efforts, and on the quality of reforms implemented domestically.

If we had an honest political class that is decided to undergo reforms as soon as possible and renounce the privileges enjoyed within the current political system, we may succeed to join the EU in 5 years.

But so far, I have not seen determination and sincere commitment by the current political class. Therefore, from my point of view, it may take Moldova not less than 10 years to get there.

■ **Lina Grâu:** You have been at the Riga EaP Summit and have attended a conference devoted to the work of the civil society in the Eastern Partnership countries. What is the EU perception about Moldova? How is it perceived compare to one year and a half ago when it was still regarded as the EU success story?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** There is a certain change in the European capitals - the European politicians and diplomats are concerned about the developments in our country, in particular about the scale of the banking crisis that is threatening to disrupt the stability necessary to implement the Association Agreement, risking to throw the country into an acute political crisis. And, of course, they are not very happy with this. At the same time, they are trying to do their best to keep our politicians engaged in the process of reforms entailed by the Association Agreement.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Immediately after the Summit, certain developments started in Moldova which are of big concern. This is about the statements made after Ukraine stopped the transit of military transports to the Transnistrian region where Russian troops are stationed. Moscow reacted through tough statements saying it will not abandon the troops. In Chisinau they are already drawing parallels between the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius and what followed in Ukraine and the current developments in our region. What do you think about this?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** There are developments that could destabilize the situation not only in Moldova, but also in Ukraine. I fear that Russia could resort to extreme actions, including the opening of a humanitarian aid airlift for the Transnistrian region, which could create new problems in Moldova that could complicate the very process of political settlement of the conflict. We do not know how Ukraine will react to such actions and we also don't know what the Transnistrian reaction may be.

We may be witnessing profound isolation of the administration in the region and abandoning of the dialogue with Chisinau. I fear this will not facilitate at all the stability in our country.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Given the regional situation and the results of the Riga Summit, what do you think will be the developments in the next period - in the short and medium term? In the long term, you mentioned that you are optimistic about the European course. How do we get there as the impression in Chisinau is that we got into a stalemate?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** In the short term, I am less optimistic as the domestic developments are not positive for the European future of our country. On the contrary, they risk throwing the country into a deep crisis. The current pro-European political class, in my view, is not able to cope with this crisis. In these conditions, we risk to have a less pro-European government in Moldova in the coming years.

And here a whole series of questions appears: what will the attitude of this government be towards the Association Agreement? Will it try to

implement it or renegotiate it, as some leftist parties have publicly stated that they will do? Or will they try to cancel it completely? This should be of concern not only for the EU but particularly for Moldova and for its society that we all know is deeply divided on geopolitical criteria.

Half of our citizens are still committed to the European integration. Regardless of what the polls are showing, in my view, half of the population is in favour of the European course. And I fear that this part of society will not tolerate such a possible decision by a pro-Russian government. Of course, the effect could be the escalation of social tensions in the country with rather dangerous consequences for us all.

■ **Lina Grău:** How do you see the way out of the crisis in Moldova?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** I do not have a clear answer to this question and I find it hard to formulate an answer given the precarious situation of our political class and the division of our society into different camps based on the East-West criterion...

But at the same time, I am glad that the Moldovan society, be it pro-European or pro-Russian, is deeply unhappy with the rampant corruption in our country and the quality of the political class. I hope very much this will increase the civic spirit of our citizens who will become more active in relation to the political class, trying to hold it responsible not only through protests but also through civic actions so that the politicians think more about the problems of the society and less about its selfish interests.

Stanislav Secrieru: If we look at the developments in Moldova, there is practically nothing that would recommend it for a European perspective



Stanislav Secrieru, expert with the Polish Foreign Policy Institute (psim.pl), says the Riga Summit should be regarded in the wider context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. *The very fact that the summit took place and was attended by high level European leaders speaks of the great importance the EU attaches to the Eastern neighbourhood. If we compare it with the southern neighbourhood, the so-called Mediterranean union, no major events such as summits took place there for a long time.*

■ **Stanislav Secrieru:** Beyond the fact that the Summit did take place and was represented by the EU at the highest level, I think, the Summit Declaration is balanced and based on a consensus

reached in the EU and subsequently negotiated with the Eastern Partnership states.

It was not easy, because what was highly visible at the summit was the very high differentiation between the members of the Eastern Partnership - different ambitions, requirements or expectations, but also different sacrifices they are willing to make in order to achieve their objectives in relation to the EU.

Overall, I would avoid the question whether the Riga Summit was a success or a failure. I'd rather see this as an ongoing process in which some countries of the Eastern Partnership are approaching step-by-step the EU, while others are seeking a more distant way of interaction.

■ **Lina Grău:** You were talking about a gradual rapprochement to the EU of the Eastern Partnership countries. How does the EU see the progress in Moldova, which a year ago was regarded as the EaP success story and hope, given the significant negative developments in the country? Do you think one can speak about a successful European path and a European Union membership perspective for Moldova?

■ **Stanislav Secrieru:** The answer to this question is given at the technical level by the Article 49 of the EU Treaty, which

stipulates that a basic precondition for EU membership is for the country to be European. And Moldova is a European state. But this precondition is not sufficient to become Member State - Moldova should comply with other criteria as well.

Therefore, when we talk about the European perspective of the Republic of Moldova we should take into account the fact that Moldova is a European state. Secondly, in order for Moldova to qualify for the next phase it should become a candidate state and begin negotiations that should end up in accession. The third element is the political decision within the EU.

From these three components necessary for the affirmation of Moldova's European perspective, we have only the geographic one. If we look at the developments in Moldova, unfortunately, there is practically nothing that would recommend it for a firm prospect or progress towards the European integration.

At the same time, neither the situation within the European Union and the debate about a possible enlargement is encouraging. In addition, the EU has to cope with multiple domestic and external problems which are not necessarily related to its Eastern partners - migration, Greece and stabilization of the economic situation –and which are raised by some EU Member States in order to review the Lisbon Treaty or correct certain provisions.

It is very difficult within the EU to provide diplomatic support to Moldova as long as the implementation of the Association Agreement, the justice reform and the continuation of reforms in other sectors are somehow suspended or in some cases even stopped. I think the focus should be

on the domestic issues rather than on the symbolic things like what was mentioned or not mentioned in the Riga Summit Declaration.

■ **Lina Grâu:** You spoke about the Moldovan -EU relationship. But what is the role of the Russian Federation in this equation? There is much talk about the fact that what is happening in Ukraine and the processes in Moldova may also be an influence of the Russian Federation. To what extent do you think they are determinant for the existent crisis in Moldova?

■ **Stanislav Secrieru:** For Moldova, the visibly harmful foreign policy of the Russian Federation toward its neighbours should be an additional factor to motivate the government and the whole society to mobilize in order to conduct reforms, because there are no illusions that Russia is willing to take a number of measures in the economic, political and even military area, as we see it, unfortunately, in Ukraine, in order to stop the European course of the most ambitious Eastern Partnership countries.

These dangers and the multiple risks emanating from the East should serve as an additional reason for Moldova to accelerate reforms which, beside the fact that they are inherently bringing it closer to the EU, make it more resistant to the pressure put by Russia.

And when I speak about the resistance and immunity that Moldova should develop, I'm thinking about the justice reform and fighting against corruption. I am also thinking about the energy reforms- implementation of strategically important projects of interconnection with the EU market - the electricity grids, pipelines, implementation of the 3rd energy legislation package. I'm thinking about a number of economic reforms to make Moldova more attractive and bring more investments

into the country, investments that could contribute to its economic development.

So, the negative factor posed by Russia to its neighbours, including Moldova, should be a catalyst for the states to reform faster.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Lately I have heard comments regarding the situation in the region, according to which, what is happening in our region means a de facto disappearance of the buffer zones between the EU and the Russian Federation and that in a foreseeable future the EU will end at the eastern border of Ukraine. How do you see the future of this region, which includes also the Republic of Moldova?

■ **Stanislav Secrieru:** Perhaps the most positive scenario for the entire European continent would be that Russia is engaged in an integrated economic structure that eliminates any obstacles for trade, investment, humanitarian exchanges and allows for a very close interaction.

But at the same time, I think this will be impossible -though preferable - without changes at the highest level in the Russian Federation - not only in the leadership but also in the entire political system. Until we witness cardinal reforms in the Russian Federation, most likely the competition in the eastern space will intensify.

It is very likely that in the next two or three years, we will see competition between the EU and Russia on several levels. Although the EU is not willing to have this competition, it is still forced by Russia into this game - a competition in the three countries that signed the Association Agreement with the EU, where Russia will try to create obstacles in the implementation of the agreements preventing the three countries from getting closer to the

EU. And, on the other hand, perhaps there will be attempts on the EU side to rethink the Neighbourhood Policy not only in the context of the war in Ukraine, but also given the post-facto annexation of Crimea. The revised European Neighbourhood Policy will have to be more sensitive to the needs of the countries, strengthening the statehood of the Eastern Partnership members. But at the same time, it will be a very painful process to rethink the relationship with Russia that the countries see it more and more not as a strategic partner but as a strategic challenge to the EU.

I do not think a dividing line between Russia and the EU will be set. I rather anticipate a policy that limits the risks coming from Russia for the EU and the Eastern Partnership states. But at the same time, the EU will leave some communication channels open to allow for a minimum dialogue so that to be able to develop the relationship with Russia when the latter opens again for cooperation.

This is, I think, will be the scenario for the next two to three years, provided that there is no dangerous escalation of the war in eastern Ukraine, a development which may subsequently have negative effects for Moldova as well.

Lina Grău: You have mentioned about the prospect of reforming the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership. At the end of 2014 the European Commission President announced about the revision of the ENP and that this autumn the Commission will present suggestions on the future direction of this policy. What are your expectations? Do you think the EU will be more ambitious or, on the contrary, less ambitious in relation to the Eastern Partnership countries taking into account the Russian factor?

Stanislav Secieru: Since the launch of the ENP, the EU has been in a continuous process of its improvement – it has drawn lessons from failures and successes and has revised its instruments in order to make its policy more efficient. Now, I think, we are witnessing the fifth revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy. I would not expect revolutionary ideas. Rather I would expect a much sharper redefinition of what the EU has already learned - the principle of differentiation between the associated and non-associated states. Probably, it will try to make the use of the financial resources allocated to this policy more efficient. We have already seen it in Riga the announcement about the creation of financial instruments for the states which have signed the Association Agreement. And thirdly, I would expect a more realistic vision of the EU on what the EU can achieve in the neighbourhood and what it is not able to accomplish without the contribution of the States concerned. So, beside the fact that the EU wants positive achievements in those states, there is need for political will in the Eastern Partnership countries.

I think this is going to be an interactive process. We have already seen that they are seeking opinion of the civil society and the EU research centres on the ENP. I think, in autumn, we will have an ENP framework document that will better respond to the risks coming from both the southern and eastern EU neighbourhood, but also will be more effective in solving the problems faced by the EU neighbouring states.

Lina Grău: I think one of the fundamental questions will be whether the EU will provide or not the European perspective to the Eastern Partnership states. Do you think there will be such a commitment?

Stanislav Secieru: This is very unlikely, because there is no consensus within the EU on this issue. Nor the most advanced countries in the Eastern Partnership offer reasons for such a debate to result in a positive response. It is very important for the three signatories of the Association Agreement to conduct real reforms and implement the Association Agreement. Without reforms and functional institutions that can resist to the political pressure and without healthy mechanisms for economic development, it will be very difficult to promote the cause of the three countries in the EU with a view to obtaining the membership perspective.

At the same time, we must recognize that the clear prospect of the EU integration for the countries in the Central and Eastern Europe was an important element that motivated the political and economic elites, and the society as a whole to absorb the costs of reforms. The European perspective was that light at the end of the tunnel which has guided the reform efforts of states and economies.

Certainly, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova need such a motivating factor though it is highly unlikely that such a perspective will be given to them until the end of this year. Unfortunately, the three states will have to please themselves with the mentioning in the Association Agreements of the fact that they are European countries, which implies that the Association Agreement is not the last phase of European integration for those countries and that something more will follow.

On the short and medium term, what is really important for the three countries is to conduct ambitious reforms of the state institutions.

Editorial

By Stefan Gorda



Who launched the spectre of an accession application by Moldova at the Riga Summit?

If you don't want to become disillusioned, don't have illusions (Buddhist proverb)

Neologisms have gotten under our skin, in the subconscious. We cannot live without their presumptive action and we cannot longer even breathe without believing, unconsciously, that a neologism will someday solve the great problems that are overwhelming us. We do not understand very well its meaning, but we like it almost unanimously. Summit!!! A magic word - so sweet, so much expected and with so many hopes! Moldovans like to have summits every year just like Patron's days- with mandatory long processions because they have prepared long for it.

A beautiful summit must end up in praise. That's for Moldovans a real Patron's day. It's the joy of meeting,

the end of long expectations, and by all means - a day of glory and praise! But to be honest, what added value can such a day bring? Does the GDP increase, do the vineyards yield better harvests, do the apples sell better, and do the bananas get cheaper? No! Instead you get so much spiritual satisfaction- so many discussions to prepare for a Patron's Day and so many sweet memories after!

Do you know how we celebrate the Patron's Day here? Almost like we did in the case of the Vilnius Summit! We got so many praises then and we were so proud of that! But there is one difference – the villages and people get ready for the Patron's Day, while for the summit – as God decides and as the EU decides. The only thing which counts is that everything is fine and we get praised!

This is exactly how it was in the case of the Riga Summit. Was Moldova

ready for a historic Summit - a reunion which could truly mark its history and change its destiny? Does the situation in the country speak of big changes for the better? Was it only an OK from Brussels or Riga which was missing to complete the picture of the creative work in building a European country? Is the general mood of the population on a positive trend? Are the soldiers or the farmers better off? Our general perception of our life, but also the general perception of the European partners about us, how is it? Is that really a big secret?

Is it not in Moldova that the people trust the Church the most in the hope that until they reach God the Saints from other institutions that are discredited and often anaemic, will not eat them? Is it not that the trust in the future and social cohesion, is now at the lowest odds? Is it not in Moldova that we can hardly have 50 percent of active supporters of the European integration?



MAY 2015

Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

Was it not in Moldova that the banking system was looted and that three of the best banks were simply swept away by still unidentified groups? Was it not our democratically elected and pro-European government which provided guarantees in the amount of billion lei in order to save the above-mentioned banks instead of ordering the legal institutions to identify the fraudsters?

In this situation, what was the basis of the enormous expectations from the Riga Summit of the media, the public, youth, academics, political circles? Was there any real sign of tangible, quantifiable, measurable progress made by Moldova towards the EU accession, only 10 months after signing of the Association Agreement on 27 June 2014?

Having been working for the Moldovan diplomatic mission in Prague for 5 years, I can say that there are few EU countries that have sustained the Republic of Moldova on its path towards Europe as consistently as the Czech Republic. It is true that the assistance was accompanied by realism and traditional scepticism. But when this demagogic, cynical and unreasonable information appeared that Moldova will submit an EU membership application at the Riga Summit, my interlocutors in Prague - the Foreign Ministry, Government, Parliament, Presidency, journalists and civil society representatives- just smiled ironically and in a spirit of respect and friendship, advised me to continue my mission in the pragmatic and realistic way I have done until now.

The closest friends even advised me, for the sake of Moldova and the good relationship that we have had until now, not to address the issue in an ultimatum way. Both Czech diplomats and friends and colleagues from other countries show enough knowledge of the Moldovan realities – fundamental

economic problems, the blockade by Russia, the lack of a fair justice system, endemic corruption and the disallowed wavering with regard to security issues and geopolitical choice of influential political forces, including some which have been in power in the recent years...

The first conclusion that I would like to point out is that the expectations from this summit were unreasonably high. The actual domestic performance hardly qualifies us for finishing successfully the Association Agreement ratification process. Implementation is still a difficult and challenging process. The enormous tasks of the administrative apparatus, economic sphere and the society in general in the European integration process are not sufficiently explained. Therefore the process is neither understood nor massively supported by wider circles of the population.

The second conclusion drawn in this period of 10 months since the signing of the Association Agreement and until the Riga Summit is that the public communication and explanation of the European integration process are extremely inefficient. People can only support what and who they understand and can follow only those they trust. What was the summit in essence? Again we do not understand it very well or we don't understand it whatsoever. This is because the information is distorted or is not explained very well. And because some of those who explain it are not credible any longer.

The summit confirmed the openness of the EU for Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and other countries in the region. And there is no question of capitulation to the Kremlin pressure. Maybe we can speak about sparing Russia in a somewhat mitigating language –this is what we understood from the Summit Declaration.

In general, it is clear that the EU will persevere in its support for the countries in the region. And it's clear that the grey area or the buffer between the EU and Russia is melting irreversibly. Ukraine's eastern border will become inevitably the border between the EU and Russia. That's the whole logic and the profound meaning of the document adopted in Riga on May 22nd, 2015 - we are moving towards this perspective. The interconnection of the energy, transportation, and logistics systems, the harmonization of legislation and administrative practice in compliance with the EU and partner countries standards inevitably lead to the gradual erasure of the major differences and ultimately to the disappearance of the grey area, and specifically to the accession of the EU partner countries. Moldova will be ready to submit a membership application after it implements the Association Agreement and makes profound transformations in the country.

A third conclusion – in this historic moment, we need clarity on the political scene and a government supported unequivocally by a clear Parliamentary majority. The public life and the political elite should become credible. The political personalities facing image crisis should withdraw from politics and new, credible politicians should be promoted. There is need for national cohesion and open, honest and professional support of the government in its reform efforts, including the current Government. There is need for direct involvement of creative minds and energies. Otherwise, we will wait in vain for new European Summits.

Stefan Gorda, Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to the Czech Republic and the Holy See

Corruption is an enormous obstacle to the development of a prosperous and democratic society

Interview with His Excellency U.S. Ambassador to Moldova James D. Pettit

■ **Lina Grău:** What are your priorities as U.S. Ambassador to Moldova?

■ **James D. Pettit:** President Obama's priorities, Secretary of State Kerry's priorities and my priorities are the same: to help Moldova implement needed reforms, develop democratic institutions and a favourable economic environment, and advance on the path toward European integration. We are helping Moldova meet these goals through our numerous assistance programs as well as by implementing the Strategic Dialogue our countries agreed to in March 2014.

■ **Lina Grău:** What were your first impressions of Moldova?

■ **James D. Pettit:** What impressed me most was the great potential for development I saw here, in particular, its capable and educated people, its location and its growing success in fields as diverse as wine production, IT and fashion.

■ **Lina Grău:** What political, geopolitical, economic and social developments do you expect from the Moldovan coalition government?

■ **James D. Pettit:** The question should not be what I expect from the Moldovan government, but rather what the Moldovan people expect from it. I believe that they expect their government to keep the promises made during the elections: that is, to implement reforms, to reduce the level of corruption, to provide transparency in decision-making processes, etc.



Given the situation in neighbouring Ukraine as well as Moldova's own challenges, this government does not have the luxury of time. It will need to act quickly and decisively on the reform agenda it promised to implement.

At the same time, the citizens of Moldova must be vigilant and, if necessary, hold their elected officials accountable through democratic and transparent processes that respect the rule of law.

■ **Lina Grău:** What foreign policy path or integration vector will be most beneficial to Moldova?

■ **James D. Pettit:** The U.S. supports Moldova's desire for European integration. Moldova's movement toward the EU and the implementation of the reforms needed for further integration will undoubtedly cause changes in Moldova's legal and economic structures. These reforms, however, are important for the

economic development of the country and for Moldova's success as a modern prosperous state.

European integration is the right path for prosperity. And although this path may be a bit difficult at times, the rewards are immense. As we have seen with many other countries, greater integration with the EU – the world's largest trading bloc – has consistently brought with it significant economic growth, including an increase in exports, employment opportunities, purchasing power and incomes.

But as Moldova works toward greater integration with Europe, it needs to maintain good relations with its eastern partners. This is obvious given Moldovan history and the bonds that it has with the east. For me, the idea of the east versus the west is a false choice. It does not have to be either/or. There is nothing in the proposed Association Agreement or the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area that

would hinder or compromise Moldova's existing ties with Russia.

■ **Lina Grău:** What must Moldova do to make real progress toward European integration?

■ **James D. Pettit:** It must implement the reform agenda. This, of course, depends on the will and the skill of the government and the country's political leaders. But frankly, progress also depends on the Moldovan people. The Moldovan people must be the engine driving the government's efforts to implement the promised reforms. As I said, the citizens of Moldova must be vigilant and hold their elected officials accountable, making sure they keep their electoral promises.

■ **Lina Grău:** What reforms are necessary in the following fields: the business environment, the judicial system, the fight against corruption, and mass media?

■ **James D. Pettit:** I want to emphasize the need for reforms that will promote private sector investment in Moldova. These include the timely passage of legislation strengthening the independence of the General Prosecutor's Office, providing regulatory clarity for energy companies, and establishing new standards of corporate governance in the banking sector.

The continued fight against corruption is an indispensable part of the reform process. Corruption is an enormous obstacle to the development of a prosperous and democratic society. Corruption reduces public trust in democratic institutions and deprives government coffers of needed funds. One of the major components of the fight against corruption is reform in the justice sector. We have long supported reform in this sector; helping, for example, Moldovan courts create a case management system.

I must reiterate the United States' longstanding support for freedom of the press. I want to encourage Moldova to take every precaution necessary to ensure that there is space for free journalistic activity. I am concerned that the growing monopolization of the media and the absence of transparency in media ownership will harm the media environment and limit the media's ability to provide a diversity of views and perspectives.

■ **Lina Grău:** How can the crisis in the banking system be resolved? What do you think about the allegations of corruption being raised against some Moldovan political leaders?

■ **James D. Pettit:** It is imperative that Moldovan authorities undertake an impartial, transparent and comprehensive investigation of the banking scandal. It is also imperative that the government institute comprehensive reforms in the banking sector and institute new standards of corporate governance for banks. These actions will help ensure that Moldova's banking system is strong; that it inspires investors' confidence, and that it supports Moldovan entrepreneurs with much-needed financing.

■ **Lina Grău:** Why hasn't the idea of European integration become a unifying factor in Moldova? What should be done so that every Moldovan citizen understands and appreciates the benefits of European integration?

■ **James D. Pettit:** Recent surveys show a decrease in the Moldovan population's interest in European integration. I believe, however, that this is probably the result of the people's discontent and dissatisfaction with the country's leaders and the leadership's slow pace of progress on the needed reforms. I also believe that these surveys reflect the influence of the Russian disinformation campaign targeting vulnerable segments

of the Moldovan population. It is often extremely difficult for people subject to a constant barrage of "news" and opinion from Russia to discern the truth from the lies.

It is extremely important for people to understand that the rules-based economy that comes with European integration has helped to transform many countries, such as Poland and Slovakia, into dynamic and increasingly prosperous modern democratic states. The EU accounts for a quarter of the world's economy and its combined GDP totals more than 17 trillion U.S. dollars (by way of comparison, the GDP of the Customs Union stands at 2.1 trillion U.S. dollars). Twenty years ago Poland's GDP was the same as Ukraine's. Today it is twice as much. I would very much like to see a similar transformation to the Moldovan economy.

■ **Lina Grău:** What is the role of Moldova's development partners, particularly the United States, in promoting reforms? Lately, some people have said that continued foreign assistance should be based on visible progress in implementing reforms and combating corruption, otherwise there is an impression that the West supports a corrupt system in Moldova.

■ **James D. Pettit:** During the last 22 years, U.S. assistance to Moldova has totalled more than 1.2 billion U.S. dollars. U.S. assistance programs have supported and continue to support Moldova's ambitious reform and EU integration agenda. Our assistance has helped to enhance the effectiveness, transparency and accountability of the Moldovan judiciary; strengthen civil society and an independent media; improve local governance, and promote political competition.

U.S.-funded economic growth programs focus on increasing prosperity through private sector development,

improving the regulatory and operating environment for businesses, and assisting firms to attract investment and reach their export potential. These programs complement well our 262 million U.S. dollar MCC Compact in road and irrigation infrastructure investments by, for example, encouraging the growth of high-value agricultural production.

In addition to these priority program areas, U.S. assistance to Moldova also supports peace and security goals, such as improving border security, combating money laundering and human trafficking, and enhancing the international interoperability of Moldova's armed forces.

■ **Lina Grău:** What provocations in regional security do you see at the moment, taking into account the crisis in Ukraine as well as the presence of the Russian troops in Moldova?

■ **James D. Pettit:** I hope nothing provocative happens in Moldova. I also hope that all regional conflicts will be resolved in a peaceful, transparent fashion that will best meet the needs of all parties.

I want to reiterate that the people of the United States stand firmly with the people of Ukraine in their quest for a more democratic, stable, peaceful, prosperous and independent European country. As Assistant Secretary

Victoria Nuland said in Moscow, we are committed to using our good offices to urge all sides to speed implementation of their Minsk commitments, including a lasting, verifiable ceasefire and pullback of heavy weapons under OSCE monitoring in all hotspots, starting with Shyrokyne. We also stress the importance of using the Normandy format; the Trilateral Contact Group of Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE; and the four working groups under the Trilateral Contact group, which include the separatists, to make real progress in preparing for democratic elections under Ukraine's constitution, to get the entire international border monitored by the OSCE, to address the urgent humanitarian needs of the people of Donbas, and to agree on an international inspection regime for all Russian cargo entering Ukraine.

■ **Lina Grău:** What are the prospects for the Transnistrian region; especially with regard to a negotiated political settlement of the protracted conflict, a resolution of the economic crisis, and the alignment of the Transnistrian region in accordance with DCFTA?

■ **James D. Pettit:** We remain dedicated to a permanent resolution to the Transnistria conflict that respects Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity while providing a special status for Transnistria. We are a committed partner as an observer to the 5+2 negotiation

process. All of the international participants have publicly proclaimed their support for a special status for Transnistria within a unified Moldova. Any settlement, however, will require compromises on both sides, and we continue to encourage all parties to work toward meaningful progress to a resolution. A meaningful dialog between the two sides is critical to resolving the conflict. We hope they will now renew their efforts to engage in constructive discussions and take concrete steps to move forward.

■ **Lina Grău:** From your point of view, what does the future look like for relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries?

■ **James D. Pettit:** The United States supports the EU's goals to promote stability in Eastern Partnership countries by furthering democracy and good governance, fighting corruption, strengthening energy security, and supporting economic and social development. This is especially important at a time of increased Russian pressure and disinformation throughout the region.

We congratulate Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine on signing Association Agreements with the EU in 2014, and we remain committed to supporting further efforts to foster closer cooperation and partnership with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus.

The opinions expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) or of the Foreign Policy Association (APE).



Foreign Policy Association (APE) is a non-governmental organization committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country Europeanization. APE was established in fall 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public personalities and former senior officials and diplomats, all of them reunited by their commitment to contribute with their expertise and experience to formulating and promoting by the Republic of Moldova of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy.



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