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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.

TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. The fifth edition of the Moldovan Annual European Integration Debate Forum:
2. Assessing the progress in the implementation of the Association Agreement and of the commitments of the Republic of Moldova to the development partners, and
3. The role of civil society in the implementation of the European integration agenda of the Republic of Moldova.

The last period was marked by a series of important events for the Republic of Moldova



On December 11, the Constitutional Court gave a positive opinion on the initiative to include the European integration objective in the Moldovan Constitution. The Parliament will be able to put the draft law to vote after half a year since the registration of the draft law, i.e. starting with April next year. The Speaker of Parliament Andrian Candu said the Parliament will soon be introducing the draft law amending Articles 1 and 81 of the Constitution, registered by the Democratic Party in October, which states that "Moldova is oriented towards the European value space" and that "the European integration is the strategic development objective of the country".



President Igor Dodon criticized the decision of the Constitution Court accusing the latter of being the "guardian of government interests." "European integration is the vision of the ruling party and cannot be imposed as the official ideology of the state in the Constitution," said Igor Dodon, warning he would do his best to prevent the adoption of this initiative by the current Parliament.



The fifth Eastern Partnership Summit, an EU initiative dedicated to the eastern neighbours - the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus - took place on November 24th in Brussels. The final statement doesn't mention either the frozen conflicts in the region, or the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The final statement states only that "the participants in the summit are deeply worried about the continuing violation of the principles of international law in many parts of the region."



Chisinau and Tiraspol signed on November 25th four protocols aiming at ensuring the smooth running of Latin-language schools, the access of the farmers from the Dubasari raion to the farm land beyond the Ribnita-Tiraspol road, the recognition of Transnistrian university diplomas and the provision of telephone connection between the two banks of the Nistru. These topics have been among the most controversial issues between Chisinau and Tiraspol for years. The event took place before a new round of negotiations in the "5+2" format, which took place in Vienna, on 27 and 28 November. The negotiations were resumed after a break of almost one year and a half.



The progress in the Transnistrian settlement was welcomed by the OSCE Ministerial Conference that took place on 7 and 8 December in Vienna. A separate statement adopted at the summit expresses hope that the parties will continue to show political will in the course of next year and will also come to discuss issues of security and political regulation.



On December 8th, the Liaison Office of the North Atlantic Alliance was inaugurated in Chisinau. The NATO Deputy Secretary-General Rose Gottemoeller said at the event that the Alliance "fully respects Moldova's neutrality, independence and sovereignty." Igor Dodon reacted by saying that "the opening of the NATO Liaison Office involves increased risks for the national security of the state."

The fifth edition of the Moldovan Annual European Integration Debate Forum



The fifth edition of the Moldovan Annual European Integration Debate Forum was held on 30 November 2017, in Chisinau. This year's debates focused on assessing the implementation of the Association Agreement and of the commitments by Chisinau to the development partners, the role of civil society in the implementation of the European integration agenda of the Republic of Moldova and the developments in the Transnistrian settlement. The

current edition of the newsletter is presenting the discussions that took place in the first two panels - the evaluation of the implementation of the Association Agreement and the role of civil society in the implementation of the European integration agenda of the Republic of Moldova. The Forum was organized by the Foreign Policy Association and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration.

Andrei Galbur: The key word in the relationship with the EU in the next period is implementation of commitments



In the opening of the Forum, the Foreign Minister Andrei Galbur said the relations of the Republic of Moldova with the EU are enshrined in the Association Agreement - an expression of the endorsement of the European values and principles. The Moldovan authorities aim at ensuring through its actions the irreversibility of the European path.

Andrei Galbur: We are at a new stage in the implementation of the new Association Agenda and of the new Action Plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement in the period of 2017-2019.

The more efficiently we implement our commitments to the European Union, the better we prove through deeds our attachment to the principles of the European integration process. Also, the more visible the impact of the implementation of the Association

Agreement, the greater will be the trust of our citizens who want to move from words to deeds. And I think the Government is demonstrating that we are at this phase - going from words to action. And finally, we will ensure a greater trust of citizens in the positive finality of this journey. The latest opinion polls indicate an increase by more than 10 percent in the pro-European option.

Here I would like to reiterate the positive trends in the trade with the European Union- diversification of products, adoption of EU standards, new rules for consumer protection, new standards and passengers' safety, and many other examples that have a direct impact on the everyday life of citizens.

Of course, we would like our citizens to define their options as little as possible on the basis of nostalgia and as much as possible on the basis of the objectives of modernization and economic growth.

We are committed to continuing with the same persistence - whether we are working to ensure the independence of the judiciary, to continue investigating on the bank fraud and punishing those involved in it, to adopt the new Audio-visual Code or to offer new opportunities for business.

The more effective we are in the implementation of the Association Agreement, the greater the openness and the support from our European partners will be, in the sense of applying the "more for more" principle.

The key word for the Republic of Moldova in the near future is *implementation*. We have the necessary mechanisms and tools to do our homework, and the support and expertise provided by the EU in this regard are facilitating this reform process.

The external factors, whether they are geopolitical or processes that take place on the European continent, are part of this equation in which we operate today. The recent Eastern Partnership Summit is an explicit reconfirmation of the sovereign right of each partner to freely choose the level of ambitions and objectives it aspires to in its relationship with the EU.

I am sure that the authorities of the Republic of Moldova are determined to go through all stages of the European integration process with political will and intelligence combined with inclusiveness and shared responsibility. I think that this is exactly the way we should advance in achieving the aspirations of our citizens.

Peter Michalko: It is important to see every day how the values we have based our relationship on are respected

The Head of the EU Delegation to Moldova Peter Michalko, who also spoke at the Moldovan European Integration Debate Forum, underlined that very dynamic developments have taken place recently among which the Eastern Partnership Summit from 23 November in Brussels which marked the three-year anniversary of the signing of the Association Agreement and the meeting for the Transnistrian settlement in the 5+2 format in Vienna. The European official emphasized that the Association Agreement has opened all possibilities for the Republic of Moldova to achieve its goals - political association and economic integration with the EU. As to the EU's goal, it is for every citizen to feel the benefits of the European integration process.

Peter Michalko: Sometimes I have the impression that we are too pessimistic, because it seems that things do not move too much. Our relationship has gone through several periods - some in which we had a more dynamic and faster development and others in which we didn't have this kind of dynamics because of the political crisis and the bank fraud that caused lack of trust.

The current government has been in place for two years and we've seen that many things have been done, though it is clear that much remains to be done. There are several priority areas at the moment which represent the basis of development of the Moldovan state and society.

It is important to continue the economic reforms. We see developments in the banking sector. It is important to regain trust which is vital for every country, so that Republic of Moldova can attract investors and develop its economy.



It is also important to gain confidence in the field of justice which is a basic area that is very important for every person's life. Every citizen must feel that he/she is equal to others before the law. And that is also valid in the broader sense, including the economy- an independent justice is essential to be able to attract investors and for the people to live and prosper in their country.

It is also very important that the fight against corruption continue. Corruption is the phenomenon behind many negative processes in each society.

It is important to see every day that the values on which our relationship is based are respected: in the field of democratic standards, respect for human rights and civic freedoms, independent media and independent justice. All these are very important. We must see proof every day that things are in order or are about to improve. That's the basis for other necessary reforms.

If the above-mentioned are well-done, we can fulfil the goals faster and better. We can see growth in trade and what it's important now is to increase investments.

Of course, there is now a wider geographic, geopolitical context that has brought new changes into attitudes: we have a new European Union strategy that has brought more areas of cooperation. We have also several tools and commitments that are part of the Association Agreement and that we can ask our partners to fulfil. We have a structural dialogue that includes the European Parliament, the Commission, the Council, and civil society, which is very important in our relations.

So, I think, with political will and a lot of effort we can move even faster and further. I would like to end with a quote. At the end of the Eastern Partnership Summit, President Donald Tusk said that "all options are open."

Andi Cristea: It is essential that a pro-European majority continue the European path after 2018



Co-Chairman of the European Parliament Delegation for Republic of Moldova, Andi Cristea, told the Forum that it is essential that a pro-European majority continue the European path of the Republic of Moldova after the 2018 elections.

Andi Cristea: For the European Union, the Republic of Moldova is a partner, an associated state. We want to help the Republic of Moldova and that is what we are doing, because the Republic of Moldova has a European future.

We want to help the political establishment to build a rule of law and an independent justice that will successfully fight against corruption. We want to see real European values in the Republic of Moldova as the ones we are having in the EU. Of course, this process is complex and long, but we are ready to go through it all.

On the other hand, we have the Russian Federation as the eastern partner of the

eastern neighbourhood. Unfortunately, in my opinion, the Russian Federation regards the Republic of Moldova and other neighbouring states as geo-political territories and nothing more. And I'm afraid that the Russian Federation wants to preserve this status quo and the European values are posing a threat to them.

As for the relationship between Bucharest and Chisinau, this is a very special relationship that Romania could not have with any other country, because we have a common identity. That is a component of emotion. And I expect, especially next year, in 2018, when Romania celebrates the Centenary of Union, that this part of emotion will be used by the Russian Federation against the interests of Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

Now I would like to talk about the European Neighbourhood Policy. The European Neighbourhood Policy means 16 states - 10 in the south and 6 in the east-

the Eastern Partnership states, including Republic of Moldova. And if we look at the structural problems of the EU, two big issues are high on the priority agenda of the European citizens: migration and terrorism- security elements. Making a simple analysis, we see that these two challenges for the EU come from the southern neighbourhood- North Africa and the Middle East. If we compare the Republic of Moldova with the other states in the Neighbourhood Policy, we can see many elements of optimism.

Regarding the conditionality element that characterizes the EU's relations with the Republic of Moldova, it is a fair narrative at the institutional level, because conditionality is one of the few levers or even the only lever of positive pressure on the Moldovan authorities to implement reforms. It's fair, but beware! - This conditionality could be used in the future as a pretext to relocate the resources earmarked for the East to the South.

It is a matter that obliges the Moldovan authorities to be very serious in meeting the EU conditionalities. Sometimes, I would agree that these are just hyper-conditions. In the European Parliament, I saw how the colleagues from other political groups, because their parties in the Republic of Moldova are no longer in the ruling coalition, have "stepped" on the Republic of Moldova - not on the current Government, but on the Republic of Moldova. And that's a mistake.

And I also think that the Moldovan politicians have the duty to promote a fair and good image of the Republic of Moldova abroad. Because when Moldovan politicians come to Brussels, no one asks if they are Republic of Moldova - Igor Dodon, Republic of Moldova - Andrian Candu or Republic of Moldova - Maia

Sandu. It's just Republic of Moldova. And my advice for you is to take care of the image of your country that you are painting abroad.

Reforms require stability. And let's not make the mistake of thinking that the current stability in the Republic of Moldova is a given thing. Things are volatile and the fact that we have political stability is important. Reforms require much political will and I believe that the current Filip Government has the political will to bring the Republic of Moldova closer to the values of European democracy.

There is also a need for resources and for this reason it is important that the

European funding come to the Republic of Moldova. An interruption of European funding for the Republic of Moldova would be what the Russian Federation wishes to hear: a political signal of disengagement. I am optimistic and convinced that this is not going to happen.

In order to make reforms, you also need a goal. The main challenge of the Republic of Moldova at present is to integrate into the EU without having the accession mechanism at hand. I'm sorry to say that currently there is no consensus on the European Union's enlargement to the East. There will be one, but not now. For the time being, the EU is focusing on the Western Balkans.

The people here are part of Europe who have a European future and I am convinced that it is only a matter of time before the Republic of Moldova becomes a member of the European Union. It is an ample process, full of challenges. And it is very important for Moldovan politicians to understand that the culture of dialogue and the identification of negotiated solutions are part of their job description. While I'm saying this, I'm thinking about what may happen after the next legislative elections. It is essential that a pro-European majority continue to move closer to the EU. And I hope that, in the end, it is the wisdom of the political people that will make them all sit at the same table."

Ion Sturza: Republic of Moldova remains a terminus of the Soviet Union

Ion Sturza, co-founder of the Foreign Policy Association and former Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, underlined in the forum that the Moldovan authorities need to show ambition and performance rather than mediocrity in order to ask the European Union for a higher level of relations.

Ion Sturza: We have to be honest with ourselves when we are talking about a country project, because there are multiple country projects today in our small Moldovan society. For some, this means closer cooperation or even integration into the Eurasian space, although "Asian" sounds bizarre. For some, this would be reintegration with Romania, and for the others this would be a country project of consolidating the statehood based on the Moldovan uniqueness. I think that, before sitting down at the «table of the boyars», we should overcome this state of apathy and poverty. We should have the ambition to modernize our country according to the European standards and not invent any uniqueness.



Are we today a reckless neighbour or a neighbour desirable for a good integration process in the European Union? We have to admit honestly - no one in the EU wants to put an eventual accession of the Republic of Moldova on the agenda and not only for reasons of lack of performance. There are problems also

within the EU. Today, speaking with the EU public on enlargement would be an act of political suicide for any politician.

That doesn't mean we should be pessimistic. I am absolutely convinced that if we don't do our homework and don't become providers of stability and

security for the EU, we won't have a successful path in our relations.

Unfortunately, the Republic of Moldova remains the terminus of the Soviet Union, also for economic and logistic structure reasons. This is how the economic and infrastructure system were built during the Soviet period – this refers to the energy transportation, physical transport and other things. Further, the old Soviet infrastructure and geography play a trick on us in our physical integration with the EU.

I thank our brothers across the Prut for the fabulous initiatives of integrating the energy systems. But little has happened.

And the fact that today we are having a gas pipeline in Ungheni that is not actually operational and that we don't have good interconnection with the national gas system as well as the fact that we haven't had a feasibility study so far for the interconnection of the energy systems is simply an aberration. Just like we are still changing the wheels to the trains. Let us also build physical bridges across the Prut and change things so that the terminus of the Soviet Union - Republic of Moldova - becomes the terminus of the European Union.

I acknowledge our sovereign right to appreciate the level of our European

integration and that of our relations with the EU, but, please, let us have ambitions and not be mediocre. We need something like WOW. For me, it would be first and foremost the announcement of postponing the electoral reform after one electoral cycle, secondly - the rapid condemnation of the authors and recipients of the bank robbery and the recovery in 2018 of 10 percent of what was stolen. And two things for the desert: the naturalization and appointment of Ms. Laura Codruta Kovesi as director or general manager of National Anti-Corruption Center, and the second - stopping the broadcasting of the ORT and NTV TV stations by the politicians in Chisinau.

Andrian Candu: We've had both successes and failures, expectations and disappointments in our relations with the EU



Speaking at the European Integration Debate Forum of the Republic of Moldova, the speaker of Parliament, Andrian Candu, assured that European integration is the number one priority of the domestic and external agenda of the Moldovan authorities, while the Association Agreement and the Free

Trade Agreement are touchstones.

Andrian Candu: If we took a look at the exports of the Republic of Moldova, which have a particular impact on the country's economy, we would see that, if in 2003-2005 more than 65 per cent of exports were oriented towards East - the Russian Federation and the former

Soviet Union countries - in 2010, 2011 the exports to these markets accounted for 50 percent, today more than 65 percent of exports are oriented towards the European Union.

These figures are the result of the legislation that is being implemented and of the different mentality when it comes to doing business. The current agenda of the Parliament and Government is based on the implementation of the Association Agreement on various dimensions - the banking and financial system, the energy security, the business environment, the media legislation, the civil society and others.

When we refer to the implementation of the Association Agreement and the relations with the EU, we are talking about successes and failures, expectations and disappointments. We had great expectations and hopes in 2009, 2011. We had a huge disappointment in 2014 and 2015

followed by a difficult recovery period, especially with regard to the trust of our development partners, mainly of the EU, on the one hand, and the trust of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova on the other hand. The trust was lost in 2014 and 2015 because of the economic and political crisis in the Republic of Moldova, but we are gradually recovering it. And this is even reflected in the latest opinion polls - more than 50 percent of the Moldovan citizens believe in the EU and see the future of the Republic of Moldova in the big European family.

The relationship between the Republic of Moldova and the EU should be built on trust, results and pragmatism. The time has passed when the Republic of Moldova was treated blindly. Starting with January 2016 and until present, Moldova has had a relationship with the EU based on results not to call them conditionality. It has been based on the "more for more" principle. The

integration of the Republic of Moldova in the EU is a matter of the domestic agenda of the Republic of Moldova.

The biggest challenge for Moldova on the domestic agenda today is the lack of quality human resources and the necessary expertise. And I can give you an example: The Law on Renewable Energy has been worked with the EU and much effort has been made in order to adopt it. We are one year late, a delay agreed with our partners. The law will come into force only on March 1, 2018 for the simple reason that we don't have the capacity to elaborate many subsidiary acts so that we can implement the law.

If anyone thinks that the government reform- switching from 16 to 9 ministries- was just a fad, is hugely mistaken. The most important motivation of the Government reform was the lack of human resources and efficiency of the Government, including in the

implementation of the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Agreement.

If we are to refer to the international and regional context, obviously there are challenges related to the Russian Federation. But at the same time, there is a very good understanding, cooperation and even synchronization in actions between three countries that are members of the Eastern Partnership. I refer to Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. All three states are at the same level in the relationship with the EU with regard to the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Agreement, and we are beset by the same challenges- the Russian Federation, territorial integrity, energy dependence, influence through propaganda, misinformation and *fakenews*, but also by the internal challenge of lack of internal capacity and human resources.

Anna Rurka: The civil society oversight function should be protected by the authorities

Anna Rurka, President of the International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO), a Council of Europe structure, said at the Moldovan European Integration Debate Forum that civil society should have political attributions and play the role of "watchdog", while the function of NGOs in ensuring transparency must be protected by the authorities.

Anna Rurka: Firstly, I would like to affirm that the civil society plays and should play an important role in the implementation and monitoring of the European integration reform agenda in Moldova. I would like to remind you about the preamble to the Recommendation 2007/14 of the





Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to the member states, which says that the NGOs are essential contributors to the development of human rights and democracy, promotion of public ownership, participation in public life, and securing transparency and accountability of public authorities.

In my opinion, this is the most essential role of the civil society in a democratic country. So if we speak about the function of NGOs in securing transparency and accountability, we are speaking about the watchdog function of civil society and this function should be protected by the authorities.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe underlined in his last report that the legitimate concerns such as protecting public order, or preventing extremism, terrorism and money laundering cannot justify controlling NGOs or restricting their ability to carry out the legitimate watchdog role including the human rights advocacy.

One of the questions of the panel is should civil society be political. Before answering this question we should ask another one- can CSOs ensure promotion of rules and mechanisms of democratic governance and political accountability without being political. The political activities can be defined narrowly or broadly and unfortunately, the broad definition has a negative and disproportionate impact on the right of freedom of association, expression, assembly and the right to participate in the public affairs.

If the influence of the decision-making campaigning with criticism regarding the actions undertaken by the public authorities, raising awareness of the issues of concern or monitoring elections are considered as political

activities, it means that the NGOs, CSOs, the watchdog CSOs will be excluded from the conduct of public affairs.

In other cases, if the definition of political activities is limited to nomination of candidates in election, this is an example of direct engagement in politics and constitutes the narrow definition of political activity. I'm underlining the difference and bringing examples and the list of the dimension of this definition is not exhaustive.

In our perspective, all kinds of activities which apply in the scope of the conduct of public affairs should not be considered political and if they are considered so these activities should not be restricted.

Regarding the rights, the article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights says that all new measures and also the measures that are restrictive should be based on the evidence showing that they are necessary in the democratic society and proportionate to the legitimate aim. Only these arguments can lead to the restriction of freedom of association. This is also an important point and our opinion on the Hungarian law on the access to foreign funding preceded the PACE decision. Also the Venice Commission underlined in its opinion that there were no evidence that the NGOs had been involved in money laundering. So the evidence are really important to argue that the law and the measures are necessary.

Another thing is that we should make the distinction between the term "policy" and "politics". In our perspective, the policies are correlated to the policy-making process, civic participation, and the citizens who are political stakeholders aware of their

right that exercise a critical democratic control over the democratic processes. And the term "politics" is related to the institution and agent of political life in the framework of the representative democracy. I think this is the confusion between "politics" and "policy" and it is a normal thing for the NGOs and their ordinary activities to influence the policy-making process.

I would also like to draw your attention to one of the provisions of the Recommendation 2014, which underlines that "the NGOs should be free to support a particular candidate or party in an election or referendum provided that they are transparent in declaring their motivation and such support should be subject to the legislation on the funding of elections and political parties". It means that the first level of act if you want to restrict this political influence is not the Law on NGOs but the Law on Financing of Elections and Political Parties. Why the Recommendation 2007/14 allows this kind of acts, I think this is really comprehensive, because, for example, the programme of some political parties or the vote during the referendum may lead to the change of law or policy favorable to the objective defended by the CSOs.

In conclusion, as to the new guidelines on the civic participation in the political decision-making process, the Conference of NGOs and the Committee on good governance will encourage the states to implement these guidelines. We should really be careful, because participation from my point of view is a big challenge for a lot of member-states also in the European Union. So we should see to the implementation of this participation in all stages of the law making processes. But if the draft law is changing we should really take the time to consult the public opinion on the issue.

Markus Meckel: Government should abandon the idea of restricting civil society activity

Markus Meckel, a former member of the German Bundestag, underlines that a strong civil society is the basis of any democracy. "It is the task of the civil society to engage in politics, analyse, criticise, and monitor the situation in the country. The civil society should control what is happening in public life, in parties, in the economy, and to initiate public discussions. The civil society should be free to express its position and be active in public life", Markus Meckel told the Debate Forum.

Markus Meckel: There is an important link between civil society and parties. I think the difference is that civil society organizations are associations that usually have one issue they are interested in and are active for, while the parties have to give a perspective and provide a programme for the whole spectrum of policies.

Democracy in a society can be measured by vibrant civil society organizations. When we started twenty years ago with democratizing the East Germany there was a question of responsibility. We wanted to be responsible for our own society. What is really important is that everybody become a citizen and being a citizens means not just being a human being, but a part of society responsible for what happens in your own country. And to get the right of responsibility and have a legal framework for that is as crucial as the implementation of human rights, freedom of expression and freedom of association. This is the key point of democracy so we need to have in mind



that democracy is not just regulation and separation of powers. We all know for example how important the independence of the judiciary for Moldova is, but independent media and vibrant and active civil society organizations are as crucial for a democratic society.

The post-communist countries are in the starting phase of building democratic societies. They need time to convince people to get active, because the mentality of the people in the post-communist countries was to wait for the government to do things, while for a democracy it is important to be active, shape the society and be responsible for yourself.

Regarding the question whether the civil society should involve in politics, I would say that it is exactly its job. Civil society has the right to deal

with its own interests, that's why it is by definition pluralistic. It is never following a given and fixed line- the people associate for a specific interest. So civil society can have an interest too. On the other hand, it should follow the criticism of the country approaches. The public sphere of the country should not be in the hands of the government alone, but in the hands of a pluralistic society and as such it is the job of the civil society to monitor the public life and especially what the government and parties are doing as well as what the economy and the enterprises are doing.

Public debates is the job of the civil society and for that work they need to get freedom which is necessary for expressing their positions and being active in the public sphere of the society. Looking at the corruption issue nowadays, who

can deal better with it but the civil society? It is important to have public institutions that should be independent and supported by people who raise their hands and point to the problems of the society not only in the field of corruption, but also in the field of environment issues. The civil society should raise all sorts of problems but also push the parties. Of course, every party and especially the parties in power would like to have quiet civil society so that they can do their job and not be disturbed. But exactly disturbing is the job of

the civil society who should point to the issues and challenge the government with a view to solving the problems.

Coming to the question of funding, I read that there was a draft law on the table in Moldova restricting the access of the civil society to the foreign funding. I think that this is a real danger for democracy. Such regulations should just be eliminated, because we see it in Russia that restricting the civil society and independent media is distancing the country away from democracy. That's

why it is crucial for the future not to have restrictions in the funding. You should be happy, I would say, that there are powers and countries like Germany for instance, which is financing such political foundations as Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung that is organizing such debates. It is important to enhance civil society and I think it was a wise decision of the European Union to shape an Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. The EU understood that the civil society should be part of foreign policy and has an important role in democracy building.

Natalia Porubin: A state that wants to become a genuine democracy should not gag the press



Natalia Porubin, Project Coordinator at the Chisinau Journalism Investigation Center, underlines that the media and civil society have an important say in the anti-corruption fight. It's just not clear if the authorities are listening to them. The investigative journalists have published tens and hundreds of articles in which they have reported

fraudulent use of public money, but unfortunately, the responses from the actors who need to take action are minimal. And it's not clear why this is happening, says Natalia Porubin.

Natalia Porubin: "In recent years, the investigative journalists have published dozens or even hundreds of articles in which they have disclosed serious

cases of corruption and of irrational and even fraudulent use of public money. Unfortunately, there are very few reactions relative to the number of reported cases. The authorities should be glad that we, journalists, do half of their work presenting them with what they should discover.

Another finding is that as we are discovering more and more corruption cases, the system is shutting down and the access to information is becoming more and more difficult.

On the other hand, our authorities continue to react discretionary to journalistic investigations. And here I am referring to situations in which certain cases are taken into account by the authorities only when the fight against a political competitor asks for it.

While the authorities are keeping mum, the reactions are coming from the ordinary people who, when we publish

a journalistic investigation, are signaling other dozens of similar cases that happen in their localities. This cannot fail to please us. On the other hand, this puts a big question mark on the public trust in the authorities.

And if is to speak about the work of journalists and civil society, it is rather efficient. I am referring to the fact that corruption tolerance has fallen and the people don't tolerate it any longer being open to talk about it. Only I don't know how much what they are saying is taken into account by the authorities.

I cannot help talking here about the problems we, the journalists, are facing in our attempt to monitor the commitments made by our authorities towards the European fora. I am referring here to the access to information, which is more and more difficult to achieve. Whenever an official

doesn't want to provide information or has something to hide, he or she invokes personal data. In addition, trade secrets and state secrets are abused many times by the officials who simply don't want to disclose or give us access to the information of public interest.

The authorities have to understand that this is not a fad of the journalists. They are working to inform the public and not to satisfy their personal curiosity. What is more, when we look for information, we find it anyway, even if it's hidden behind seven locks. Unfortunately, we have found again in recent years that a series of databases that were opened a few years ago with the support of international partners are no longer available. They are not available or are simply outdated so they are not of great use to the journalists who are trying to do their job. For instance, the draft law on the

regulation of the use of drones is part of a longer range of actions seeking to limit access to information in any way.

Last year and also this year, there were several attempts of intimidating the journalists from the Journalism Investigation Center and not only. These actions are discouraging for the young journalists who are trying to make a name for themselves in journalism.

However, we are glad that despite all the existing problems, the investigative journalism is resisting and will continue to stand, and we promise to continue to monitor everything that the authorities are doing. A state that wants to become a genuine democracy should not gag the press. It should welcome an independent and strong press which is the guarantee of a strong state.

Nadejda Hriptievschi: Civil society cannot leave politics into the hands of only a few politicians

Nadejda Hriptievschi, Program director at the Legal Resources Center of Moldova, says that as long as the power and decision makers don't really want European integration and don't share European values, the role of civil society and free media will be very limited.

Nadejda Hriptievschi: A democracy can only work if there is an active civil society. Unfortunately, I think this is something that is not well understood in the Republic of Moldova, namely that the civil society alone cannot grow if it's constantly hindered.

The role of civil society and non-governmental organizations in



promoting European integration will remain unfortunately limited as long as we - decision-makers, power and civil society- don't talk together. We have decided that we want in Europe - so let's share those values and explain them in such a way to people so that they truly understand them. And then we will have a different ratio between the percentage of people who are in favour of the European integration and Eurasian integration.

As for political activity, first of all, the decision-makers and civil society colleagues need to understand one thing- politics is not just for politicians. And we are not just talking here about someone's desire to become deputy. In general, politics is affecting our lives every day, so we cannot just leave politics into the hands of a few politicians. It is irresponsible from the civil society representatives, and NGOs to say: "We are not involved in politics. We just need to ..." What to do? Whether you want it or not, you need to get involved in improving the legal framework for the promotion of the right direction.

The choice between European integration and Eurasian integration is nothing more than a political choice. And then, if I'm pleading for European integration, does that mean I'm doing politics and my activity should be restricted as a member of an NGO? No, the civil society and NGOs cannot be completely apolitical. It is illogical and it's also against the public interest.

How can the state institutions and civil society coordinate efforts and how can civic involvement in oversight of public affairs be ensured? We have a fairly good legal framework, though not perfect. It is also very important that there is a sincere political will to involve people who are active and want to get engaged. When the authorities give only one week for public consultations in the case of complex draft laws and when they are organising debates only for the sake of debates announcing of and inviting people to the debate just one day before the debate, we cannot call this democracy or cooperation between public authorities and NGOs.

I have noticed lately that there are times when there are no any draft

laws whatsoever or that the contests are blocked at some very important institutions. And then there are days when the legislative initiatives are coming one after the other. They are complex, introducing lots of changes and having ridiculous deadlines for consultations, for example, just one week. There is now a draft strategy for the development of the justice sector, two draft laws developed by the National Center for Personal Data Protection, which include some astonishing restrictions and propose anonymization of judgments. There is also a draft law on liberalization of the so-called business environment, which, in fact, proposes inadmissible things, like exemption from criminal liability of bank frauds, economic crimes, etc. The above-mentioned draft laws have been submitted for public consultations having been given impossible deadlines- over the night.

I believe that if civil society is really involved in the decision-making process, through concrete examples and not just words, the quality of the decisions will certainly improve while the public opinion will be more favourable towards the European integration.

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