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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

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News in Brief



Prime Minister Pavel Filip called again on the Russian Federation to start without delay the withdrawal of the military forces and ammunition from the territory of the Republic of Moldova. The statement was made at the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly. Pavel Filip thanked the states that supported several months ago the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Resolution on the withdrawal of foreign armed forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, the Prime Minister welcomed the inclusion in the agenda of the current session of the UN General Assembly of a new point on "The complete withdrawal of the foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova", which means keeping the subject in the attention of the international community, expressing confidence that the complete withdrawal of the Russian troops will facilitate the conflict settlement process and the country reintegration. Pavel Filip spoke also about the efforts made in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, referring in this sense to the "Moldova 2030" Development Strategy, which is in line with the international commitments, including the Moldova-EU Association Agreement.



At the first meeting of the Moldova-Georgia-Ukraine Inter-parliamentary Assembly, recently held in Tbilisi, the speaker of the Moldovan Parliament, Andrian Candu, launched the initiative of a trilateral platform for information exchange and countering of hybrid threats. According to Candu, the three countries could create inter-institutional contact points to make strategic analyses and exchange relevant data. He underlined the need for a competent analysis and symmetrical reactions to ensure information security in the area. "Disinformation campaigns with massive use of social networks and propaganda make use of the state vulnerabilities, having a negative impact on the fundamental democratic values and freedoms. Hybrid threats target also the financial system, public health, food security, energy, infrastructure, etc. Coordinated and competent measures are needed for an effective response", said the Moldovan Speaker of Parliament. Candu's statements were supported by his Ukrainian and Georgian counterparts, being unanimous in the need for prompt and effective response to hybrid threats.



"The Republic of Moldova is a dynamic actor of Francophonie in the Central and Eastern Europe region," said Tudor Ulianoschi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, at the Francophonie Ministerial Conference in Yerevan. The official reaffirmed the commitment of the Republic of Moldova to the promotion of French and French heritage, reiterating the role of Francophonie as a vector of the universal values of cultural and linguistic diversity, respect for democracy and the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, biodiversity and environment. The Foreign Ministers adopted several decisions aimed at enhancing the cooperation of Francophone countries in peace-building in the Francophone area, civic education and human rights, cultural participation, knowledge transfer and research, neglected tropical diseases, promotion of gender equality and participation of women in entrepreneurial activities. The meeting preceded the Francophonie Summit, hosted also by the Armenian capital.

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the most pro-European of all?..

Sorina Ștefârță

It seems under this fairy tale leitmotif that the political autumn in Chisinau is coming to an end, while the electoral parliamentary campaign is starting...

At the plenary session from October 18th, the Moldovan Parliament failed to get the 67 votes needed to introduce the phrase "European integration" into the Moldovan Constitution. The proposal came from the Democratic Party (PDM) and was strongly promoted by this political formation and its allies. In the first reading it had even been backed by the constitutional majority. In the second reading, however, something didn't work. Formally, the PDM did not accept the concession to put



to vote also the phrase "Romanian language". As a result, PLDM and PL have just changed their minds ... De facto, most likely, both sides have played political games, as a result of which some have become "pure" pro-Europeans, while the others - "anti-European", good to be beaten in the

future electoral discourse. Assumed castration, as psychoanalysts would say.

The feeling of domestic political games is reinforced also by the phenomena happening next to us and targeting us directly, but we prefer not to notice them, letting them

► pass by and thus isolating ourselves in an artificially created bubble. For example, it seems that no one in the Parliament can hear what the EU Delegation to Chisinau is saying - and it is saying that “what matters for the European Union in the relationship with the Republic of Moldova is the Association Agreement, whose preamble (the second line) recognizes the aspirations and European choice of the Republic of Moldova are”. It’s a sufficiently diplomatic answer to understand that, for Brussels, empty words are not convincing. Moreover, “we expect from the Moldovan authorities to fully respect the values included in the Association Agreement. In this respect, better implementation is needed in terms of the rule of law and respect for democratic standards...”.

Short and tough. Just as tough as the Resolution adopted on October 9th by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament to be proposed for voting in the EU legislative forum in November. A resolution that says “Moldova is a state captured by oligarchic interests” and that the EU does not want to provide us macro-financial assistance at least until the next February’s elections. “The key provisions stipulated in the Association Agreement haven’t been fulfilled,” said the parliamentary rapporteur for our country, MEP Petras Auštrevičius. Almost like a sentence issued to a convict who, what’s right, has a chance – though small, it’s a chance. For Auštrevičius mentioned, “the future of the relationship with the EU depends decisively on the way in which future elections will take place. And it is not about *who* will win, but *how* it will win...”. Find out in the current issue of the newsletter where we are now, four months before this crucial exercise.

In order to be economically and politically competitive, we should be present also in seemingly irrelevant areas

Tatiana Molcean, State Secretary of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova



If we were to count the countries with whom the Republic of Moldova has established bilateral relations for about 30 years of independent diplomacy, the office of Tatiana Molcean, State Secretary of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, responsible for the bilateral component of the foreign policy, would be just shelves with folders such as NATO, GUAM or UN ... Fortunately, today the folders are all in the computer, while Tatiana, who is a career diplomat, described -"folder by folder"-how the bilateral relations affect the position of our country in the current geopolitical context, but also how they influence the European path of the Republic of Moldova.

■ ***Mrs. Molcean, starting from October 21st, our country has a new political doctrine - PRO Moldova - which for many is equivalent to the change of the foreign policy direction and even giving up on the European integration. How will this be reflected in the bilateral relations of our country?***

■ First of all, I don’t think we can talk about radical changes in the political orientation. The Foreign Ministry, as well as the other state institutions, is guided by the Government Activity Programme, which is firmly oriented towards Euro-integration. Moreover, the Europeanization and modernization of the country can only help Moldova and make it stronger. In this context, the European integration is the red thread that guides us in the bilateral relations we are developing with other states: Ukraine and Romania, which are our strategic neighbours and which we could place on a ‘first orbit’ conventional. Then come the EU member states and the United States of America that have been our strategic partners for almost three decades and with whom we have a Strategic Dialogue.

The withdrawal of Russian military troops is an issue present in all contexts

■ **What are the key criteria for intensification of the bilateral dialogue?**

■ The geographical factor is a natural criterion, but the economic, commercial or human interest are no less important, i.e. the level of presence of our citizens in one country or another. Regarding these factors, I would say we have a good dialogue with all the states with which we have established bilateral relations. Germany, Sweden, the Baltic States, France or Italy - we try to find common interests in each destination. In the dialogue with the Russian Federation, for instance - which, I must admit, is more pragmatic than it used to be - our priority is to contribute as much as possible to reducing the legal problems faced by our citizens residing there. Another problem is the embargo on 19 product categories, imposed on our country in 2014 in response to the signing by the Republic of Moldova of the Association Agreement with the EU. Although we have proved it with figures in the last four years that the Association Agreement has no negative impact on the Russian market, that decision has not been revised yet. So, there's still work to do in this sense.

■ **To what extent is the Transnistrian issue present in the dialogue with Russia? Or have you left it entirely with the Reintegration Bureau?**

■ As I was saying above, today there is no comprehensive dialogue with the Russian Federation. But: Russia's

representative is still in the 5 + 2 format, and the withdrawal of the Russian military troops is an issue raised in all contexts of the bilateral agenda. Recently, for example, they spoke about Transnistria at the Francophonie Ministerial Conference – a platform that, at first glance, has little to do with this issue. But we use all possible levers and opportunities to promote this idea and priority: the withdrawal of Russian troops and ammunition from the sovereign territory of our country is imperative. And Francophonie means high-level international participation, with France, which today has a strong voice in the European context, and Canada, which is an important player in the world.

■ **Regarding seemingly irrelevant areas, which were, in the end, the arguments that levelled the balance in favour of the much-disputed decision to open five new embassies in countries and regions where, however, you can very rarely meet a Moldovan?**

■ We started from the state's interest and from the conclusion, based on analysis, that for a competitive diplomatic service it is not good to have no representatives in these regions for almost three decades of Independence. In addition, the interest in new outlets was another decisive factor. The opinion that countries such as India or Ghana are irrelevant to Moldova comes rather from a sort of ... tradition. The world is no longer divided into two or three poles of power, and if you want to be economically and politically competitive, you have to be present also in seemingly irrelevant areas. Yes, there was a lot of discussion about the financial factor, the fact that these

five embassies imply additional costs, and be sure that this issue was not overlooked at the ministry too. But at the same time, I don't think everything has to be judged in these terms in the diplomatic service. When it comes to the external dimension, the image of the country and the national interest should be the reason no. 1.

Ukraine is the most complete and most complex dossier we have

■ **Getting back to the neighbourhood, what does the dialogue with Ukraine look like? They say that since it has been facing similar problems to ours in the field of separatism, its optic towards the Republic of Moldova has changed.**

■ Ukraine is the most complete and most complex dossier, but I don't say it in a negative way. On the contrary, Ukraine is also the most accomplished dossier, especially in the last two years. It is complex, because we have many different topics on the negotiation table, many of which have been accumulated in previous years and even in the USSR period. Everything is sensitive and important, but in the last period the dialogue has improved significantly. That is why I don't agree at all with those who say Ukraine is more open because it faces similar problems. It is rather a change of attitude of the leadership in Kiev.

■ **How do we deal with the issues of the Nistru whose future looks tragic given the intention of Ukraine to build a hydroelectric land along the river?**

■ It is a dossier that we need to examine carefully, taking care of the legal framework and the expertise provided by the development partners. There should be no suspicion that something will be given up on, etc. Moreover, in reality, things don't always work as we would like to: legislators and regulators are moving slowly, while the energy sector representatives are much faster. And naturally, the latter and the ecologists have extremely different positions... That's why- in order to get a unanimous consensus and not allow for the catastrophe that the ecologists are warning us about- the Moldovan and Ukrainian Prime Ministers signed a joint request to the European Commission for technical expertise. UNDP is conducting - with funding from Sweden, at the European Commission request - a study in order to assess the impact of any construction, but also of what has been done so far. At the level of governments and working groups (Ministry of Economy is conducting the negotiations on behalf of our country), but also on a personal level we understand, both Kiev and Chisinau - that if something happens to the Nistru River, we will all have to suffer. The Odessa region is totally dependent on the Nistru water.

■ **What is happening on the other river?**

■ Romania has a double status – a neighbouring state and a EU member state. In particular, we have been feeling it this year, when Bucharest is preparing to take over the rotating Presidency of the European Union from Vienna on the 1st of January 2019. This is a fact that marks our bilateral dialogue and I was pleased with the announcement made by Prime Minister Pavel Filip

on the 24th of October, according to which the joint meeting of the two Governments - Bucharest and Chisinau - will necessarily take place until the end of this year. So there is a solid dialogue at all levels.

■ **If everything is so good, I will ask you a dilettante citizen's question: can the foreign office do anything to improve the situation at the customs?**

■ It is a constant issue on our agenda, but it is also in the direct focus of the Government. Thus, the number of employees was increased on both sides during the holidays when the flow of people is higher. It is obvious that the time will also come when we will have to discuss the establishment of joint check points with Romania as we did it with Ukraine. But it is not a simple process, and we should be understanding with the Romanian authorities who have the mission of being the first filter for those entering the EU space who, let's admit it, are not always people of goodwill. Romania has strict commitments, including in the context of the criteria for joining the Schengen area, and has to prove that it is entitled to be accepted in this club.

For Brussels it is important today to prepare also positive scenarios

■ **What is your focus when it comes to 'weighty' states?**

■ If it's to refer to the EU, we constantly reiterate the message that the Republic of Moldova is firmly committed to the implementation of the Association Agreement. Thus, our goal is to strengthen the existing support for this principled position. The same message is valid for the dialogue with Washington and the Russian Federation.

It is important that we do not see this process in any way as conflicting or inconsistent with the development of relations with other countries.

■ **Who are our allies today?**

■ I would not use this term. It depends very much on the political families and certain geopolitical traditions. Thus, the interest of Germany and the Nordic countries for the region remains constant. The Baltic states or those in Central Europe support us regardless of political colour ... But our goal is to develop active relationships with those for whom we do not represent an immediate neighbourhood, such as France or Italy. Instead, there, our asset is the numerous fellow citizens living and working in those countries, and contributing to their economies.

■ **Generally, 2018 was a difficult year for our relationship with the EU. We hope it will be better, but if that relationship worsens even more, how will it affect the bilateral dialogue?**

■ This year hasn't been easy, indeed. But I would avoid the forecasts starting with "if". I believe it is important for Brussels today to also prepare positive scenarios, not just to anticipate abuses and freezing of the dialogue. Otherwise, we are running a risk if after the February elections the things don't look so bad, but we will be in crisis of ideas, projects and programmes, because we will have not anticipated a positive outcome. I remain optimistic that Moldova will take some of the tests. This mood is necessary for all those involved in the European integration, including for us, at the foreign office.

■ **Wish you success and... optimism!**

Sorina Ștefăruță

Editorial

Let's get back to the (de facto) irreversibility of the European course

Victoria Bucătaru,
Executive director,
Foreign Policy Association



The so-called *twitter revolution* from April 2009 and, together with it, the liberation of the spirit of democracy allowed for the Republic of Moldova to orient its course towards a new development model, and namely that of the European Union. The civilization values, but also the quality of life, the degree of economic development and the business prospects in the community space, have burst then in the form of alluring lights at the end of a tunnel with a length of ... at least eight years of communist regime.

Meanwhile, another ten years have passed, a period when the irreversibility of the European path of the country has become a constantly and cyclically invoked subject at certain stages, either as a mobilizing factor or invoking its threat or prejudice. The reasons - or pretexts? – were different, the foreign threats prevailing each time. As a rule, the popularity of another direction was alluded, and namely the *Eurasian* one. And we have not even thought of or noticed the destructive octopus that was developing within the state.

More than that. It appears that with the liberalization of the visa regime and the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union in 2014, the Moldovan authorities have seen their feet firmly and forever fixed on the European soil. As a result, the irreversibility of the European path was an increasingly rare subject in the public discourse, the general perception being that the window of opportunity was still open to our country, and we only have to make the decisive leap.

This state of mind was somehow justified by the enormous and almost unconditional support of the development partners offered to the official Chisinau immediately after 2009, as well as by the euphoria generated in November 2013 by the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit. A Summit that not only confirmed the subsequent signing of the

Association Agreement and the visa liberalization, but also gave our country the hope for the EU candidate member. The 2015 Riga Summit made it all the more disappointing when the European partners, confused by the undemocratic processes in the Republic of Moldova and by the big corruption cases, not only did not invoke the European perspective for Moldova, but even highlighted the association nature of the signed documents that do not involve accession to the European Union.

Although repeatedly requested, the European perspective has become an upsetting topic for the European circles and national institutions of member states. The 'deal' proposed by the Chisinau authorities has not convinced the European partners, who still don't understand how a state that doesn't make progress in terms of good governance and rule of law could be helped just by the introduction in the Constitution of the "European perspective" phrase.

Respectively, being more practical, the Europeans have continued to ask for progress in the key reforms and major issues such as the theft of the billion and high corruption in the vital sectors that jeopardize not only the Republic of Moldova but also the member states. Moreover, for the first time in the EU's relationship with the partner states, there has been introduced political conditionality for providing macro-financial assistance, but also the "more for more" principle. We all know the result: the 100 million Euro macro-financial assistance has been repeatedly suspended while the relationship between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union has reached maximum tensions in 2018.

This being the state of play, the situation we find ourselves is, at least, absurd. On the one hand, in Chişinău, the authorities strongly promote the inclusion in the Constitution of the phrase "European integration" as the main political vector, and I am convinced this could be one of the most viable ways of safeguarding the European path. On the other hand, the same authorities are flagrantly

violating the values and principles they committed to respect under the existent agreements, neglecting the warming signals coming from the Euro-Atlantic partners.

Brussels has repeatedly sent - through European officials and progress reports - clear diplomatic messages about the EU's concerns regarding the domestic developments in our country. Less diplomatic messages conveyed with the same firmness came through the European Parliament's resolution of July 5, 2018, following the invalidation of the local elections' results in Chisinau. Thus, there is no doubt that the formal declarations and decisions of the so-called pro-European ruling parties in Moldova no longer please the ears of anyone. An exception could only be those who can benefit from Moldova's failure to become a genuine democracy - and here I refer not only to external actors, but also to the internal ones.

And yet how do we translate the irreversibility of the European path into life? Perhaps, remembering Ovidius's words: "there is no need for words, put your hope in deeds ..." The irreversibility of the European path does not lie in declarations, but in actions with good faith in line with the commitments made by the Republic of Moldova, when it was entrusted with confidence by the European partners. The irreversibility of the European course means good governance, rule of law, freedom of speech and inviolability of human rights. It should be a major sacrifice of society, political elites, and each of us in order to change perceptions, fight stereotypes, and develop a culture of integrity.

Not even for the EU member-states is the European course irreversible

Iulian Groza, director of the Institute for European Policy and Reforms (IPRE)



October in Chisinau was politically controversial. Some opinion leaders have argued that given the pompous reception of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan - but especially given the fact that the dialogue with the Ankara leader didn't address the thorny issue of the Turkish teachers expelled one month ago from Moldova - our country has definitely given up on the European values. Other opinion leaders, including the representatives of the political class, have shown that they are determined to continue promotion of the European direction and have put to vote the introduction of the phrase "European integration"

into the Constitution of the country as evidence. The proposal did not meet the necessary majority, but served instead as an unofficial start of the next parliamentary election ... In parallel, in Brussels, the clouds seem to be getting darker for the Republic of Moldova, and the well-informed mouths are saying that the question one can hear too often in the European institutions is not good for us: "What to do with Moldova?". It is also with this question that I started the discussion with Iulian Groza, former Deputy Foreign Minister and director of IPRE.

■ Mr. Groza, what about Moldova? Or what should our European partners do? The latest evaluation report on the implementation of the Association Agreement (AA), released a month ago, is also not too optimistic...

■ Indeed, the Third Alternative Report on the Implementation of the AA with the EU for the First Semester of 2018 reveals that, compared to 2017, our country is regressing. Even though the beginning of the year seemed to be a promising one, and we also had a few high-level visits to Brussels... Things have taken a different turn in the summer together with the

invalidation of the results of the local elections in Chisinau, then with the adoption of the controversial Law on the voluntary income declaration and tax amnesty, which has cancelled the past efforts of the authorities in preventing the money laundering. On top of that, it was the Government reaction to the European Parliament's Resolution of July 5th, which it ruled as being politicized and incorrect. These are the main mistakes made by the by the current government, which have led to cooling of the relationship with European partners, slowing of political dialogue and suspension of the EU financial assistance. They have all pulled down the level of progress in the implementation of the Association Agreement and have shadowed the positive developments.

■ **Which are the areas with positive developments?**

■ Some 41% of the actions contained in the National Action Plan on the implementation of the Association Agreement were implemented. The best indicator is in the trade sector - here, as in 2017, there is a moderate progress due to an increase in the trade share with the EU which accounts for 68% and the promotion of legislative measures transposing the EU acquis in the veterinary field, food packaging etc. There is also progress in the transposition of legislation in the energy and financial banking sectors. Other developments have been in the area of foreign and security policy: the new agreement on the exchange of classified information has entered into force, which offers more possibilities for cooperation with the EU in the field of security; the cooperation with the EUBAM and strengthening of

joint check points at the Moldovan-Ukrainian border on the Transnistrian segment are continuing. However, the lowest rate of progress is registered in the areas of justice, freedom and security - 29%.

■ **Which are essential for progress. However, the government continues to argue that the European course is irreversible. Is that so?**

■ Not even for the EU member-states is the European course irreversible. The example of states such as Hungary, Poland - which are facing internal challenges on key issues related to values, justice, democracy - shows that when there exist severe abuses, the EU can apply sanctions that can result in political consequences such as triggering of Article 7 of the EU Treaty. Even when you are a member of the EU, you should constantly take care of the fundamental values and ensure that the European integration is not just about the accession process and that you can relax on the beach and drink beer. European integration is a continuous action.

In this context, speaking of the Republic of Moldova, there is no doubt that today we are going through a series of challenges related to the functioning of the democratic institutions, justice and the rule of law, and the criticism coming from the EU partners is no longer just formal. There have been discussions about the independence of justice, democracy, and human rights since 2004. These objectives are still part of the RM-EU Action Plan. We are in 2018 now, but seem to be back in time. We continue to face the same problems although

we have an ambitious AA, we have a visa-free regime with the EU, we have enjoyed strong political and financial support from the EU even in the period after 2015 when the image of the country was affected by the bank fraud and the idea of "captured state". And yet today, at the end of 2018, the situation seems to be worse than ever. The position of the EU is not just at the level of individual discourse, but it is reflected in a unique position of all three EU institutions - the Parliament, the Council and the Commission. They all have a unique message about the situation in the Republic of Moldova. If before 2015 or 2014 we were discussing how to advance and get the candidate status, etc., today we are concerned about how to get back to the minimum standards of the rule of law and human rights.

The success story was a state of affairs and one-time thing

■ **Since you are talking about this, I cannot help asking you: did the famous success story exist or was it a lie that we all wanted to believe in, because that sounded good?**

■ It wasn't a lie - it was a state of affairs and a credit of trust that we had got at the time, on the one hand. On the other hand, the EU was looking for a model in the region, because in other countries of the Eastern Partnership the situation was even worse than ours... Respectively, the "success story" reflected the momentum of an ascending relationship. Today, unfortunately, we are convinced that it was more of an illusion, because while we were talking about the Association Agreement and the visa liberalisation regime, behind the curtains of the



“success stories”, they were working out schemes that were not only incompatible with the European course, but were about personal interests and about grabbing as much financial and administrative resources as possible in order to keep power.

■ ***As an exponent of that government, what mistakes do you think you have made at the time?***

■ As for me and my colleagues from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, as well as from other key institutions involved in the process of euro-integration and negotiation with the EU, I do not think we were wrong with anything. We all did our best so that the Republic of Moldova breaks with its past and becomes a normal country where the state institutions work to the benefit of its citizens. I knew it was a long process, but if we had used better the chances of the moment and the group interests hadn't prevailed, we might be discussing today a country roadmap for accession and we would proudly say that in three years, we have managed to fulfil most of the commitments and demonstrated that our values are European. This is how we imagined back then the near future. And we thought that both the leaders and the citizens of this country saw the things in the same way. Unfortunately, it wasn't the case.

■ ***Today, we have been offered a new path - Pro-Moldova- announced as the new state doctrine by the Democratic Party. How do you think, where will this path lead us to?***

■ First of all, I wouldn't say this is an

absolutely new course for PDM. It is rather a return to the 2009-2010 agenda, when the party positioned itself more to the centre in the post-electoral negotiations. I believe that the new narrative promoted by the PDM is predominantly for local and electoral consumption in the context of the February 2019 parliamentary elections, and I don't rule out that it was a solution to capture the electorate for which the European integration message is not relevant. In this context, there is a certain risk that the governance will focus more on populist issues or, in a more optimistic version, on material things - roads, water, sewage - which, being extremely important, will leave secondly the values we committed under the Association Agreement such as the rule of law, democracy, and human rights. However, I hope the government will maintain the message regarding the implementation of the Association Agreement and the European integration, and that the Government's work on the implementation of the Agreement, including the technical relationship with the European Union, will not suffer major changes. It's not in vain that the PDM leaders have mentioned that Pro-Moldova means building an internal agenda that, in the future, can build on the idea of European integration. It's a rather complicated approach in the current context.

The fact that governments have been called “pro-European” has been more damaging...

■ ***Also the EU rhetoric has changed a lot. The Chancellor Angela Merkel's***

recent speech in Tbilisi alone speaks volumes- she welcomed the Euro-integration efforts of Georgia and Ukraine, while Moldova has not even been mentioned.

■ In particular, Ms Merkel said that if Georgia remains consistent in fulfilling the AA commitments, it is not ruled out that the EU will be open to a more advanced relationship with it. This is rather ironic as in September 2014, Angela Merkel conveyed a similar message to the Republic of Moldova, saying that if we succeed in maintaining a reform-oriented government and advance with the implementation of the Association Agreement, demonstrating results, we would be the next ones...

■ ***And, at least formally, we have maintained these governments.***

■ It is not exactly like that. The first government after the 2014 elections was a minority government. The fact that these governments were called “pro-European” was not enough. Moreover, I would say that, since 2010, this has negatively influenced the citizens' perception of European integration. We could feel it especially in 2015, when the people realized that while they were discussing about Europe, someone has stolen their money. The political opposition has made full use of these breaches to make associations and even accuse the EU of having tolerated corrupt governments. In this context, the change of the perception as reflected by the last Barometer of Public Opinion is very important - for the first time in the last three or four years,

more than 50 percent of citizens opted for the EU. Personally, I am convinced that they don't connect it with certain successes of the government which, let's admit it, have been achieved since 2016 onwards. Rather, people have changed their optics due to the fact that the EU has become more categorical in assessing the domestic reform processes in the Republic of Moldova. And, hopefully, they have come to understand that the EU's aim is to bring modernization here.

■ ***And yet, does this change of rhetoric mean that in Ukraine and Georgia the situation is much better, while in our country it is really bad and this has upset everyone?***

■ Everyone is upset, even our best friends. And they are angry because we don't offer enough arguments for the country to be more actively promoted on the European agenda. I remember that in 2014 we were talking about a period when Romania will hold the EU Presidency. We were proposing that, for 2019, we should have at least a political statement recognizing our European perspective - of course, based on performance and progress. Unfortunately, we cannot speak today about this and we focus, at least, on maintaining minimum standards in the field of the rule of law and democratic values. In this sense, yes, our situation is worse than in Georgia and Ukraine. At least, the domestic efforts of these countries are more consistent than ours.

Georgia has managed to make the most of the opportunities offered by the Association Agreement and

today a new dialogue format with Brussels is being discussed - meetings between the Tbilisi Government and the European Commission. It is important to be consistent and this is probably the lesson we should learn in our relationship with the EU. And the lesson that Georgia and Ukraine have to learn from our current situation is that if you take it wrong, things can change very quickly in the dialogue with the EU. Especially, in all the three countries, the political process is strongly controlled and influenced by the economic and even the oligarchic factor. Unlike us, in Ukraine there is a sort of 'competition' between oligarchic groups, while in Georgia this factor is electorally legitimised. In addition, during Saakasvili times, they professionalized the public institutions. And we have none of these.

That is why, at the moment, the most important thing is to see what can be done in our relationship with the EU so that the positive pressure that the EU can exert on the government ensures accountability in the implementation of the reform agenda. Otherwise, we are risking that in a few years we will need a lot more time to resolve all the abuses and the debts that have been accumulating with gigantic steps.

■ ***The European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee has adopted a draft resolution that again criticizes our country for the degradation of democratic institutions. What could be the result of it?***

■ Indeed, this draft resolution – at least the part pertaining to the Republic of Moldova – has the most

straight language ever. Even though it doesn't differ too much from the July 5th Resolution, it specifically highlights the issues related to the functioning of democratic institutions. In addition, for the first time such a document mentioned that most of the problems have been caused by the state's dependence and the control that the oligarchic system has exercised over it. It is an extremely tough finding generated by that fact that Brussels seems to have exhausted all its instruments of pressure and persuasion, and it is now waiting to see if we pass or don't pass the electoral test in order to make a definitive decision with regard to us. It is clear today that we will have no macro-financial assistance until the elections. The budgetary assistance is hanging by a thread. The political dialogue at the official level is almost inexistent.

The only thing that can save us is the free and fair elections, recognized internationally, and a legitimate government. But these seem unlikely if the primary interest of the current governing party is to maintain power at all costs - limiting opportunities for the Opposition, consolidating the internal loyalty of people and institutions that are politically dependent and by means of various conviction-coercion actions. The risks are high and the potential costs are so heavy that the price we pay now will look like a joke.

■ ***Thank you for the interview.***

Sorina Ștefârță

Expert opinion

Dionis Cenușă: “Both the Europeans and Americans are waiting for the ‘electoral recycling’ from 2019”

Dionis Cenușă, associate expert at “Expert-Grup”, author of a permanent column at the Info-Prim Neo Press Agency and, more recently, PhD student at Justus-Liebig University in Gießen, Germany, keeps monitoring and commenting in a prompt and pertinent way the political life in Chisinau. This time, he made it from the distance of an ocean, being among the experts invited to the debate on the Republic of Moldova, organized by the prestigious Atlantic Council in Washington.

About the chance of ‘recycling the political class in power’

The resolution adopted on 9 October by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament shows there is no illusion in Brussels of the willingness of the Moldovan authorities to keep their promise. The incoherence and volatility of government has tired the European institutions that are more and more distrustful in relation to partners who change the rules of the game to the point that they are able to satisfy their current interests. Invalidation of local elections in Chisinau has forever disqualified the government and led to the postponement or suspension of the new European assistance instalments. The only voices that



support the Democratic Party are several Romanian MEPs who are very close to the Bucharest government that is being treated, however, with increasing suspicion in Brussels. It is obvious today that the only thing that can restore the EU confidence in the Moldovan decision-makers is fair and free elections, which would allow for the recycling of the political class. However, an exhaustive change in this sense is unlikely. For which reason, a necessary minimum would be the regeneration of the political power with forces treated with more public confidence, which will at least ensure a balance of forces.

About the current state of the Moldovan- EU relationship and its possible recovery

Chisinau’s relationship with the European Union is currently on the water line. Though the financial

assistance was postponed until after the elections, and the decision to resume will be based on the quality and fairness of elections, the bilateral dialogue on the technical aspects of the implementation of the Association Agreement has not stopped. Thus, while political field is dominated by mistrust and disappointment, the economic part compensates for the general attitude of European officials regarding the European integration agenda in the Republic of Moldova. Only proper conduct of the parliamentary elections can qualitatively contribute to the improvement of the image, despite the danger that the Democrats could come together with the Socialists or fugitives from the President Igor Dodon’s party.

It is this electoral background that most probably generated the idea of introducing the “European integration” phrase in the Constitution. The ruling party needs it not because there is indeed a risk that the European orientation will be revised, but because this thing has an electoral value. However, the promoters of the idea failed to be credible, including because the Socialists managed to convince the European diplomats that they will not abandon the Association Agreement. The position of the Russian business

that showed open interest towards the trade opportunities of the Agreement came in support to them. However, exploiting the matter before the election campaign will allow for the PDM to criticize the “pro-European” opposition, which had conditioned the proposed revisions and ultimately rejected them. Thus, in addition to the internal geopolitical victory, the Democrats will be able to geo-politicize their political discourse and secure their access to power on the basis of polarization

About the new-old narratives of the Chisinau politics and the bilateral relations with the strategic partners

The apparently new message of the Moldovan political class that is taking shape - *PRO Moldova* or the fourth way of PDM; a sort of third way of President Dodon who is opting for a Europe from Sahalin to Vladivostok - is proof that both the Democrats headed by Vladimir Plahotniuc and the Socialists led indirectly by Igor Dodon, are in need of an extended electorate in order to rule the country after February 2019. That’s why they are appealing to the broadest segment

of the population - the one who, according to the opinion polls, would like to combine the foreign policy directions. Because the Socialists have an extended pool of such voters, but also because of the PDM’s failure to widen its influence on the pro-EU wing, the Democrats have decided to take over the Socialists’ motto, known as *pro-Moldova*.

In this context, we have to admit that as long as the government is concerned about its political survival, the relationship of the Republic of Moldova with its strategic partners, seen as promoters of democracy, is wasted, being exposed to dubious stratagems. One of them seems to be coming closer to controversial country leaders who are appealed to come to Chisinau, as the case of the Turkish President shows, including by abusing the democratic norms such as the expulsion of Turkish teachers.

About the regional security risks and their impact on internal security

These topics have been discussed, from different perspectives, also at the recent event organized by

the Atlantic Council in Washington, which I attended. It was an important meeting of the Eastern and US expert community, which addressed the security risks in the region. The American decision-makers have expressed clear support for Ukraine and Georgia, and a more modest support for the Republic of Moldova. As a result of the Moldovan authorities’ actions from this year, both Europeans and Americans are somewhat more reluctant and expect “electoral recycling”. Another important topic was the frozen conflicts, and in our case - the Transnistrian conflict. We have concluded that the undemocratic practices with dubious schemes, such as the production of cryptocurrency on the account of the unpaid Russian natural gas are dangerous for the economic security, but also for the integrity of democratic institutions at least at the regional level. We also reminded that the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict requires active participation of the civil society, one precondition being the withdrawal of Russian troops and munitions, which are illegally stationed on the Moldovan territory.

Sorina Ștefârță

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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