

Foreign Policy Association together with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung offer you a newsletter on foreign policy and European integration issues of the Republic of Moldova. The newsletter is part of the "Foreign Policy Dialogue" joint Project.

NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

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Importante, pe scurt



President Igor Dodon went to Tighina on Tuesday, December 25th, where he met with Vadim Krasnoselski, the head of the Tiraspol separatist administration. According to Igor Dodon, the two discussed the results of the confidence building measures in the past two years and agreed upon a new 5+2 negotiations round in the near future. At the same time, on his Facebook post, Igor Dodon reconfirmed the importance of maintaining the current peacekeeping operation "as a factor of sustaining stability and calmness in the Security Zone": "...this year there have been certain challenges in this area, but we managed to overcome them, through joint efforts, without serious complications, including due to the fact that the residents on both sides support the steps taken to strengthen peace and stability in our country."



On Wednesday, December 19th, the European Commission published its second Report on the Visa Suspension Mechanism with the EU, urging the Republic of Moldova to take immediate steps to fight corruption and money laundering, so that Moldovans can still benefit from free movement. And namely, the Commission warned Chisinau about strengthening border control, bringing the laws on tax reforms in line with the EU standards, strengthening the National Integrity Authority, and effectively implementing the asset declaration system for high-ranking officials, investigating bank fraud and money recovery. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration announced that it "took note" of the evaluation and recommendations of the European Commission and that the recommendations will be analysed and incorporated into the National Calendar for the fulfilment of the given recommendations.



The Republic of Moldova - Georgia - Ukraine Interparliamentary Assembly condemns, in a joint resolution, Russia's aggressive military actions against Ukraine in the Kerch Strait in the Azov Sea. According to the resolution, Russia's military attacks are a flagrant violation of international law, the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The three countries reaffirm their unconditional support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and call on the Russian government to return the ships and to immediately release the illegally detained Ukrainian soldiers; to ensure the international transport through the Kerch Strait and the Azov Sea; to cease aggressive and provocative actions in the occupied and annexed territories, respecting international commitments; to unconditionally withdraw its troops and ammunition and to cease destabilizing the internal situation of the neighbouring states. The resolution urges the international community to take action against Russia's illegal operations in the Kerch Strait to prevent the escalation of tensions; and the EU and the USA - to expand political support for the democratic states in Eastern Europe.



Cooperation at the state border and the interaction of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in the international organizations were the key topics of the telephone conversation between the Prime Minister Pavel Filip and Petro Poroshenko. The Kiev leader thanked Chisinau for co-authoring and supporting, within the UN General Assembly, on December 17th, the resolution initiated by Ukraine on the militarization of Crimea. The two leaders exchanged views also on the developments in the two countries and the region. Particular attention was paid to the Transnistrian settlement, noting the steps taken by the Government of Moldova in this direction.

A Moldovan-German story as a review of the year



The participants to the Moldovan-German project visiting the Embassy of the Republic of Moldova to Berlin

Sorina Ștefârță

It is the end of the calendar cycle, and in the few remaining days of 2018, but also in the early days of the future 2019, we will be reviewing our memories about the passing year. We will be trying to make forecasts for the good and - unavoidably,

unfortunately - negative events that could happen in the next 12 months. And we will be looking for solutions to the challenges that the country and its people are facing in order to reach the promised welfare and finally have a normal life. The current edition of the foreign policy newsletter is no exception either.

We are inviting you to find out how- in the opinion of Claus Neukirch, the head of the OSCE Mission to Chisinau- things are developing in the area of Transnistrian settlement, offering you as well an analysis-prognosis made by the political analyst Dionis Cenușă. Apart from this, however, ►

► as an editor, I would like to offer you a story about people who are building bridges to other people. It is precisely the popular diplomacy that sometimes keeps alive what the politicians are about to destroy. So...

The Republic of Moldova and its realities through the eyes of 12 young German journalists. Moldova and its challenges in the context of cooperation with Germany and the European Union through the eyes of ten young Moldovan journalists. You can find it everything on the platform <http://www.europe-in-sight.eu/>, launched in mid-December 2018, which is the result of a half-year project implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft e.V. from Berlin and the Chisinau School of Advanced Journalism (ŞSAJ).

Financed by the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Moldovan-German project "Europe in sight: The German-Moldovan journalist network goes online!" was conceived as a way to reflect through the media the most important aspects of local development policies, but also of the implementation of the Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova. The project aimed also at stimulating the expansion of political and economic cooperation on the basis of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

In fact, the project aims to bring young journalists closer to the Republic of Moldova and to Germany, and along with this - to create an extra bridge between the two countries as it is known that there is always room for more knowledge.

The first stage of the project took place in Chisinau in September 2018, when the Chisinau School of Advanced Journalism hosted 12 young German journalists who came to discover the Republic of Moldova. It was an intense week, with formal and less formal meetings, with visits to state institutions - ministries, the Parliament, the German Embassy - but also to TV stations or non-governmental organizations, to GIZ or to the German foundations present in Moldova. The topics discussed were equally diverse: the political and socio-economic realities of the Republic of Moldova, the European integration process and the bilateral relations with Germany, the February 2019 parliamentary elections, the brain drain and the migration phenomenon – the German journalists had come very well-prepared to Chisinau...

The Moldovans' response visit to Berlin took place in November 2018. The Chisinau team included journalists already working for various mass media, as well as students and graduates of the Chisinau School of Advanced Journalism for whom this project represented an extra chance for professional development. Also, in Berlin the journalists met with public authorities and NGOs, found out what the priorities of the Moldovan Embassy in Germany are, participated in one of the most popular morning TV shows and documented themselves for the materials they wrote as soon as they arrived at home. Among the most frequent questions they had to answer in Berlin were those related to the fight against corruption by the authorities

in Chisinau, the justice reform, the development of the rule of law and democracy and the promotion of a free and independent press.

Last but not least, the young journalists focused also on human stories, direct or indirect results of the Moldovan cooperation with Germany and the EU. According to the German project coordinator Sebastian Rösner, the project success lies not only in the media products developed, but especially in the resulted connection between the German and Moldovan journalists. "They communicated, enjoyed themselves and helped each other to identify the necessary subjects and sources - actually, though they signed the texts individually, they worked in a team - so we can say we have achieved our objective of creating a network of journalists" was convinced Mr Rösner.

All the journalistic materials produced within the project - articles, podcasts, photo galleries, video clips, interviews, reports, and success stories - were published on the websites of the mass media that the project participants are working for. At the same time, they can be found in corpore, in English, on <http://www.europe-in-sight.eu> – a platform developed for the first time in the Republic of Moldova with the participation of the Chisinau School of Advanced Journalism which is going to be used in the future by the students.

It is not everything and it is not enough either. But it is a step forward. Happy and prolific years!

Perspectives always exist, so, let's be constructive and optimistic

Claus Neukirch, Head of the OSCE Mission to the Republic of Moldova

The end of the year is traditionally a period of review. For Mr Claus Neukirch, however, this end of the year is also a sort of beginning, because it is only a few months since he has started his mandate as head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova. What does he think, between this conventional ending and the beginning of term, about the developments in the settlement process of the Transnistrian conflict and their speed? How big the “small steps” that bring the two banks of the Nistru closer to each other are and what the expectations from 2019 are, find out from the following interview.

■ **Mr. Neukirch, in November it was one year since the signing in Vienna of the four Protocols on Transdnistria by the Political Representatives from Chisinau and Tiraspol. How do you assess the progress achieved in their implementation?**

■ First of all, I have to say that, by signing these protocols, we made a very important step in Vienna and, this year, not only have we made great progress, but have even worked to implement the decisions made in Vienna, including the one on the licence plates for vehicles from Transdnistria. But let's look at them one at a time. To begin with, I think we all have to appreciate the fact that due to this process



the situation of the Latin-script schools is much more stable now than it used to be before, and here I would say the protocol has been fully implemented. Today, we have a clear situation in these schools - they have stable lease contracts, they pay the gas and water tariffs at the same level as the entire Transdnistria, while for the free movement of teachers and pupils a very pragmatic solution has been found based on identity cards. This means we have stability in relation to those schools. Of course, we talked to the directors of the schools, there are other issues to be solved, but these are actually not included in the protocol. That is why we have to differentiate between implementing the protocol per se and other issues to be solved. There is still much work to be done, beyond the signed protocols.

As regards farmers' access to the land in Dorotcaia, significant progress has been made. More than 90 percent of the land has been returned. There are still problems with the land whose owners are not in the country or where the legal ownership is not clear, in addition to the 100 hectares belonging to the Dorotcaia town hall. But I think that can be solved. The issue put before local authorities in Transdnistria has been solved. . The resumption of landline phone connection has been linked in the protocol to the resumption of mobile phone connection. There are commercial interests here which are not so easy to settle, but the government of the Republic of Moldova has made a big effort, a big step forward, as well as the Parliament, by adopting amendments to the legislation and there is in practice a possibility to solve this problem. This would mean, first of all, the reintegration of phone communications, and this would mean that phone tariffs will decrease. We shall not forget that there are over 200 thousand citizens of the Republic of Moldova beyond the Nistru, and that there are relatives, acquaintances, very close links on both banks, therefore, we are working now closely with the Government with regard to the final resolution of the telecommunications problem.

It is an opening to the world that is in everyone's interest

■ ***Has the application of apostille on education documents issued by the University of Tiraspol justified your expectations?***

■ The apostille application on the education documents issued by the Tiraspol University is fully operational - almost 200 apostilles have been applied, and this means the Tiraspol students have the opportunity to study all over the world, not just in Russia. The opening of the world to people in Transnistria is in everyone's interest. Another opening - but also a closer connection - is brought by the restoration of the traffic on the Gura Bâcului-Bacioc Bridge. It is the fastest connection and we feel it as we go to Tiraspol frequently, but I think, especially the residents of the two banks feel it. We certainly hope that we would be able to repair the bridge and open it for the circulation of trucks weighing up to 40 tonnes, which would be the reconnection with a European transport corridor. There are two problems to solve in this case - one is technical, the bridge has to be repaired, and the second one is a security issue, because no one wants to repair the bridge and then have the new customs terminal installed. This is a problem that can be solved and which we will be working on next year.

■ ***The most sensitive issue was that of the neutral registration plates for the Transnistrian cars. Several analysts have described this measure as one of the biggest concessions, with***

adverse repercussions on the conflict resolution process. Why has there been such a reaction and how does this regime work from your point of view?

■ I think you should refer the question to people who say this has been a concession. It is very difficult for me to understand where there was a concession. We have a situation where there are vehicles from Transnistria with neutral design licence plates, MD stickers as part of the package, as well as joint registration by Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities. This opens for Transnistrian drivers the road to the West, not only to Russia. I frankly don't understand where there is a concession. I think it's a win situation for the Republic of Moldova - I don't think anybody in Chisinau prefers to see cars registered in Transnistria, with the Transnistrian flag, to neutral licence plates. It is the same in the case of the Transnistrians - they have surely seen this thing which was also in their best interest. It was a success for both parties and first of all it was a success for the people on the two banks of the Nistru.

Today it is clear that concrete things were done in 2018

■ ***What were the main topics of discussion at the OSCE Ministerial Council recently held in Milan as well as the practical relevance for the Republic of Moldova of the Final Statement of the Meeting?***

■ There were results in many fields. The adoption at OSCE of a decision on journalists' security was significant.

There were other decisions: on combating trafficking in human beings, especially children, a strategy on the Mediterranean region was adopted, perhaps of lesser importance for the Republic of Moldova but for Mediterranean states and especially for Italy it was very important. I think the adopted declaration on the Transnistrian conflict was the most important for the Republic of Moldova. This has already been a tradition since 2012 - every year OSCE reconfirms its position on the final settlement, based on the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, with a special status for Transnistria. The work of both sides - the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria - their political will as well as the fact that important steps were made in order to implement the above-mentioned protocol decisions have been appreciated. And I think this is a decision upon which we can work very well in 2019.

■ ***The "tradition" you are talking about is a rather relative issue. On the one hand, it means that we remain on the spot, on the other hand - that nothing changes...***

■ I wouldn't say nothing changes. The content of the statements has changed from year to year. Today it is clear that concrete things were done in 2018. Last year the signing of the protocols was welcomed, while this year we have witnessed real things that have been done, which is a big difference. And it is always easier to sign an agreement or protocol than to put them into practice... Of course, we want to reach a declaration that would welcome the final settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. This is the

direction we should move to step by step.

■ **Regarding the regional context, how does the situation in the neighbouring Ukraine influence the settlement process? Does this open up new opportunities, given that Ukraine's interest in security has increased or, on the contrary, it complicates things? I'm asking this also in the context of the Milan summit, where Kiev has called on to strengthen the sanctions against Russia, while the USA, Canada and EU representatives have declared their support for the neighbouring country...**

■ I felt during the discussion of the declaration on settlement, and during talks with Ukrainian colleagues that Ukraine works very intensively, very constructively for the settlement of the Transdnestrian conflict. During these discussions we did not feel that the conflicts that exist globally and in relation to Ukraine did affect the Transdnestrian settlement process. All mediators and observers are working toward the settlement of the Transdnestrian conflict. They are capable of putting aside their differences in other fields to this end - this is not little and I think it has to be appreciated.

I don't see the need to discuss another format today

■ **How do you assess the mandate of the Italian OSCE Presidency, whose special representative, Franco Frattini, has been very harshly criticized for his rather**

contradictory positions on the Republic of Moldova? What are your expectations from the Slovak Presidency and which are the themes you are going to focus on?

■ We are working step by step. We have worked very well with the Italian Presidency and I think Mr Frattini, as Special Representative, has also had a very decisive impact - in particular, during the discussions in Rome on the adoption of the 5+2 Protocol Decision. Now, we will focus on working further with the Slovak Presidency. We hope to be able to go to Slovakia together with colleagues in Chisinau and Tiraspol, as soon as possible, at the beginning of the year, in order to identify or plan the next steps.

■ **Because you have mentioned the two parties ... There are experts who believe that the final solution you are talking about is not going to happen as long as it is not recognized that de facto the negotiations should be conducted with Moscow, not with Tiraspol, which doesn't actually decide anything and should be in general excluded from the 5+2 format...**

■ I think the 5+2 format is absolutely appropriate for discussion because all actors who need to be involved are directly or indirectly involved, including the Russian Federation, and I don't see the need to discuss another format today. We will focus on moving on in this direction in this format.

■ **By the way, the year 2018 was one in which the escalation of the Nistru River by the Transnistrian troops, under the pretext of military exercises, became a habit. How are**

you monitoring these situations and what are you doing to prevent them?

■ We noticed concerns existing in Chisinau, in Kyiv. Our Mission has the mandate to monitor the situation, including the military situation and we are going to continue to do so. I think drawing on this we will be very attentive next year and be able to come up with our assessments.

■ **What expectations do you have from 2019? Could this become a year of launching negotiations on the political issues with the Transnistrian side?**

■ Obviously, we are working on the three baskets. If both sides are ready to discuss the third basket, which concerns also political issues, it would be very good to move in this direction. We are ready to facilitate not only social economic but also political talks. We need to see, together with colleagues in the Slovak chairmanship, how prepared for that Chisinau and Tiraspol are, when and how to launch such talks.

And a message for all - let's be constructive and optimistic, and work further, because we should move further. Perspectives always exist, and when I say that, I remember a case that I like to give as an example. Namely... in January 1989, Mr. Erich Honecker, who was then general secretary of the United German Socialist Party, said the Berlin Wall would stay another 50 or 100 years. Six months later the Wall collapsed...

■ **- Thank you for the interview and I wish you a year as prolific as possible!**

Editorial

The chain of abuses and... political weaknesses

Victoria Bucătaru,
Executive director, Foreign Policy Association

The year 2018, which is rapidly approaching its end, was marked by an unprecedented degradation of the relationship between Chisinau and Brussels. The problems have become more and they let us occasionally know about them, because the political life is not free from disturbances, temptations and trials. But the main reason for the current state of affairs is well known: the numerous antidemocratic abuses that threatened the still fragile good governance in the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, the East-West geopolitical controversy gained a new nuance in 2018, our country being the first to obtain the observer status within the Eurasian Union.

Therefore, Chisinau's foreign policy cannot be characterized as constant either at the level of institutions or at the level of declarations. In addition, there is a major gap in the strategic communication both inside and outside the country ... All these more or less recent developments place the Republic of Moldova in the category of fragile states, which will surely generate a re-evaluation by the Euro-Atlantic partners of the political and economic cooperation relations.

Following the invalidation of the local elections' results in Chisinau, previously considered free and fair by the international observers, the Euro-Atlantic partners raised questions about the independence of the judiciary, freedom of expression, and integrity of public institutions. On 5 July 2018, the European Parliament voted the resolution on the political crisis in the Republic of Moldova following the invalidation of the local elections in Chisinau - a document which, among other things, notes the lack of progress in the investigation of the bank fraud, and thus reminds of the chain of abuses and weaknesses in the relationship between Brussels and Chisinau.

A series of other resolutions, documents and statements has followed that reconfirmed the position of the European Union as well as its decision not to provide macro-financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova until the full re-engagement of the state in the implementation of the Association Agreement. In the meantime, however ... the uncertain and even tensed relations between the Republic of Moldova and the Euro-Atlantic partners place the country in an uncertain area with an obvious trend of isolationism ...



The foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova suffers undoubtedly from these internal involutions. How the future parliamentary elections are going to influence the relations of the Republic of Moldova with the development partners remains to be seen, but it is certain that the messages sent by the ruling elites from Chisinau are neither encouraging nor provide for a favourable development based on mutual trust. However, mention should be made that the representatives of Brussels, as well as of

Washington, have repeatedly underlined the importance of conducting a free and fair electoral process. They also miss no single opportunity to highlight that the principles of the democratic system, good governance, freedom of justice and expression have to be respected.

And there is something else that should not be ignored ... The rivalry between the Presidential institution, on the one hand, and the Government and the Parliament, on the other hand, is becoming visible also externally, not just in the country. Although the head of state officially positions himself as a promoter of a balanced policy between the East and the West, it is enough to pursue his actions to convince yourself that the foreign policy orientation promoted by President Igor Dodon is eminently pro-Eastern. Dodon is the one who obtained the observer status for the Republic of Moldova within the Eurasian Union, a decision that sparked controversy in Chisinau, but also confusion in the international circles. In addition, during two years of his term, Igor Dodon had no meeting with his counterpart in Bucharest, Klaus Iohannis, but also with the one in Kiev, Petro Poroshenko. It is a clear signal of disagreement over the position of the Government in regional policy, but also a failure of Dodon's alleged political equilibrium.

A progress of Moldovan foreign policy in the year which is coming to an end is considered to be the inclusion on the UN agenda of the issue of withdrawal of the Russian military contingent from the territory of the Transnistrian region. The UN General Assembly Resolution of June 2018, as well as the mentioning of this issue in the final NATO Summit Declaration in July, reaffirms the political support of the Euro-Atlantic partners in the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. However, the basic question lies in the practical steps that can be taken to withdraw Russian troops and ammunition, and in reconfiguring the 5 + 2 negotiation format, where Russia has the status of mediator and peacekeeping mission. But here there is need for political desire and will - in Chisinau, but also in the USA or the EU.

„European integration is a means by which, at least in part, the current government ensures its political legitimacy”

Dionis Cenușă, associate expert with „Expert-Grup”

As it was announced in December last year, the year 2018 was not at all quiet. We had early local elections for Chisinau - which in the end proved to have not happened, the results being cancelled by the court; we had yet to guess when the current Parliament would decide on the election date for the next Legislature; and, to crown it all, we managed to get down to an unprecedented level in the relationship with the European Union. Where we are at the moment and what the scenarios for the next political cycle in the Republic of Moldova are: these are the topics discussed with Dionis Cenușă, an associate expert with “Expert-Grup”, author of a permanent column at the Info-Prim Neo Press Agency and a PhD candidate at the Justus-Liebig University in Gießen, Germany.

Ilan Shor has only “systematized” what his predecessors did

■ Mr. Cenușă, one week ago, the launch of the first post-Soviet kolkhoz in the Republic of Moldova was announced. It happened in Jora de Mijloc - a village headed, starting with last summer, by the vice-president of the “Shor” Party that many analysts see as a field of electoral experiments. What is this actually? Is it a scene from the Theatre of political Absurd, a trick or a...?

■ I would have said it’s an action of the socialists, based on the Belarusian model. And I would have been wrong! All I can say at the moment is that Ilan



Shor shows consistency, launching actions dedicated to a very well-defined social group - and here I refer to the elderly, above all. These actions are targeted at the most nostalgic citizens of the Soviet past. But obviously the main target of this first Moldovan kolkhoz and of the social shops scattered all over the country is the parliamentary elections from February 24, 2019. I don’t think Ilan Shor will get the majority in the parliament, but he will no doubt have an important word to say in the future government.

■ How can you explain this phenomenon?

■ He understands it well the vulnerabilities of the Moldovan society and which social categories are more sensitive to populist messages focused on survival issues - and takes advantage of it. We are talking about a segment of the population that cannot emigrate in the short or long term and is very much dependent on the

public budget. This segment has always been, if I may put it so, quite “traded” among politicians. Ilan Șor did nothing but bring a new level of quality to what his predecessors had previously practiced. He has modernized the primitive methods used 15-20 years ago, when the people were given a pair of galoshes and one kilogram of rice instead of salary or in exchange for the vote. Taking advantage of the resources available, he systematized and created a sort of mechanism as we are talking about several actions already, which generate a synergy that can be dangerous in the conditions when the Republic of Moldova can’t get rid of the status of a poor country and, more recently, of a captured state.

■ It looks as if we haven’t progressed at all in terms of political culture, in these 27 years since the independence of the Republic of Moldova?

■ Such an approach reflects only half of reality. Because there is, however, a Moldova that has changed - and I am referring especially to those who are outside the country. The problem is that, for many people that stayed in the county, the poverty they are struggling with is a major hindrance that doesn’t allow them to make a qualitative leap and find themselves in another political class that promotes authentic principles and values. From this point of view, I think the Democratic Party and the Socialists have changed the Electoral Code, creating constituencies, including in order to diminish the role of the diaspora in the future. It is precisely because the diaspora has for the most



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part made this qualitative leap that it no longer represents their electoral basin.

The longer the “ice age”, the higher the costs

■ *In the context of the forthcoming elections and the possible fraud, the press has already reported numerous actions of “pre-election corruption” - ranging from generous donations from obscure sources to concerts where artists sing for free. And then, what are the chances for us to meet the expectations of the EU, the USA, etc., who keep telling us that the February elections are going to be a test of democracy for us?*

■ Let's not forget one thing: every time it talks about abuses or the quality of democracy and governance in a country, the EU also adds that it will respect the choice made by the population. So, even if this election is considered by the opposition or the international observers as excessively corrupted, the EU, the USA and other partners will still start the discussion with any of the governments that will be elected. A relevant example in this sense is the recent presidential election in Georgia, where they used an ingenious scenario for the banking system. Though the scenario was qualified as corruptible by observers, the EU did not come up with a tough statement in relation to that. So the results of the vote can be criticized to a certain point, after which the EU will have to cooperate with those who will be elected. This seems to be very well understood by the Democratic Party, which is now doing its utmost to win the election or, at least, to secure a comfortable number of “other” deputies whom they can later on attract into the governing coalition in order to establish the government, etc. The most vulnerable in this respect will be the deputies of Shor's and the PSRM.

■ *To what extent is the cancellation of electoral results based on the “municipal” scenario from last summer possible? Because it's enough to cancel them in half of the constituencies...*

■ The Moldovan politics is unpredictable and the last two years have shown this. I don't rule out that the PDM will make the necessary calculations and will decide if it is necessary or not to cancel the vote. But the latest changes at the Constitutional Court or the Court of Accounts speak more about their intention to limit the number of positions that could be politically negotiated in a possible ruling coalition. So they are unlikely to want a new invalidation of the vote - they have seen the consequences and I don't think they want to remain isolated. The interview with the Deputy Prime Minister Iurie Leanca from the previous newsletter, in which he talks about the government's effort to relaunch the dialogue with the EU, is evidence to that. They need the EU as the euro-integration is the direction through which they can ensure, at least in part, the political legitimacy.

■ *Yet, they have successfully ignored Europe this year...*

■ They have been ignoring it since spring 2017, in fact. But this period has costs which increase proportionally to the duration of the “ice age”. I think there have been accumulated enough costs for this low-level communication with the EU to be stopped. As to the EU, it is working now on a new budget for the next seven years and it needs to digest the effects of the post-Brexit and revise its relations with the neighbouring countries. These are more complex processes than the Moldovan politics, therefore the Moldovan politics should take them into account.

We are perceived as an anti-model and a risk generator

■ *In recent months and weeks, you have participated in several regional and European events. What is the general atmosphere, also in relation to us?*

■ Unfortunately, the name of the Republic of Moldova is permanently on the lips of European officials and experts in the region - always in a negative context, as an anti-model. And it is a pity, because we used to be also a “success story” once... At present, however, we are an alarming case to the circles of experts, because our example could be taken over by the countries in the region. In addition, we are seen as a risk generator and as a lever to revive Russia's influence in the region.

■ *In fact, Chisinau insists it is fighting with the Russian influence, among the “last battles” being the “Open Dialogue” scandal, in which many see a trivial attempt to remove the Moldovan opposition from the electoral race...*

■ It is a rather funny but extremely sensitive situation, of the 30,000 Syrians sort which happened in the 2016 presidential campaign. I think the purpose is to harass the Opposition and discredit it in relation to its own voters, but also in relation to the foreign structures within which the Opposition is active and with whom it enjoys credibility. It's killing two birds with one stone, so to speak. In addition, it's a means of creating problems to this electoral bloc which is going to be in the future Parliament anyway.

■ *By the way, was it a good idea to create the “ACUM” electoral bloc?*

■ The fact that the mathematical principles do not always work in politics is well known. However, this is a better

way to streamline resources - when you don't have much money to make yourself visible compared to other electoral contestants - when you have limited access to national media coverage; and to reach out to the region - where you are not sufficiently present. A fragmented Opposition is an easier target for a government that has monopolized everything at the institutional, administrative and financial levels. A united Opposition has a single voice both inside and outside. The problem I see today is the leader of this bloc, who seems to be at least ... two. And this issue, I think, will perpetuate in the future Parliament, where also the Opposition are going to have seats.

■ ***And one more thing: what is behind the avalanche of unionist parties?***

■ Since the number of Moldovans who got disappointed in the Moldovan state and its institutions is growing, the number of those who want to be connected to the social system from over the Prut and see the unification with Romania as a success, it is natural for the political parties to take advantage of these aspirations. They are supported by the political forces in Romania that are trying to get here crucial votes sometimes.

Also, in this electoral campaign we will remain in the geopolitical trap

■ ***What might be the new messages launched in this campaign, including on the foreign policy dimension?***

■ I'm inclined to think that the Moldovan politicians are rather limited in terms of new topics they can launch, especially in foreign policy. And this is because of the geopolitical trap that we have been volens-nolens finding ourselves

into for years. That's why I don't think we'll see and hear anything new. For instance, I don't think anyone is going to discuss the issue of joining NATO - it will, at least, not be taken up as a central message, because the public opinion is still resistant to this idea. At the same time, they will surely insist on the idea of strategic relationship with Russia - the socialists are not going to give up the pro-Russian discourse they have taken over from the Communists, which they have intensely exploited and de facto monopolized in the last four years. On the other hand, there is a likelihood that the ACUM Electoral Bloc will be talking more about the EU, not just in terms of the penalties that Brussels has to apply to the Moldovan Government, but also by focusing on the importance of reforms in the context of the Euro-integration and Association Agreement. Obviously, the PDM will also talk about the EU, though they will be carrying the train of a government that has rather damaged this relationship.

■ ***The Eastern Partnership is going to mark its tenth anniversary in 2019, and the six countries that were at the start have de facto remained three. Have we succeeded in capitalizing on what has been offered to us or we will remain a simple - but failed - success story?***

■ The Eastern Partnership has been, from the outset, a way and an instrument to complement what was already being done on the bilateral relationship with the European Union. There have been additional projects to the agreements and programmes already agreed with Brussels. That is why I see the Eastern Partnership as an important dimension in the context of the repositioning of the Republic of Moldova in the region, but also of asserting the country brand. For a transition from the post-soviet country to an Eastern Partnership state is taking place. This has changed and continues

to change the economic outlook. Investments will come much easier in a country that has an intense dialogue with the EU than in other countries which, also being post-Soviet, don't have this dimension of the dialogue with the European Union. It is a platform that intelligent governments know how to capitalize on. To my regret, very often this trio - Chisinau, Kiev, Tbilisi - has failed to have a common voice.

■ ***Was it that they didn't want it or they were not in a position to do it?***

■ Let's say the challenges were way too different. In addition, there has always been an informal competition for the EU's attention between them. Kiev has been involved in a direct war with Russia for almost five years. Tbilisi has focused on maintaining important systemic reforms, linked to the quality of government, which they have achieved before. Somehow left alone, Chisinau failed to be too convincing. And the EU has rather changed to bilateral dialogue. Beyond the strictly political aspect, the Eastern Partnership aimed also at creating networks - at the level of governments and local authorities, people and civil society. And the very fact that there exist already projects connecting a few countries - whether in the energy sector or human mobility - is a great plus that we are all benefiting from. The future of the Eastern Partnership also depends on the funding we will benefit from. Because it is not only us counting on the European support ... And the capacity of the three countries, including the Republic of Moldova, to absorb the EU assistance will depend very much on the quality of politics. And we cannot expect too many benefits as long as we are associated with the phenomenon of the captured state and power led by oligarchs.

■ ***Thank you for the interview.***

Sorina Ștefăruță

Looking from inside

20 Deliverables for 2020: moderate progress in the Republic of Moldova

Moderate economic progress due to a substantial increase in exports to the EU, as well as in the consolidation of democratic institutions and good governance, the most vulnerable being the justice reform. Mass media affected by the concentration of ownership, cartels on the advertising market, external propaganda and internal disinformation, and an increasingly smaller space for cooperation between authorities and civil society. These are only a few conclusions of the Moldova's Participation in the Eastern Partnership Report- 20 Deliverables for 2020, an additional tool aimed at promoting the achievement of key priorities of the member states and reaching tangible results by the year 2020. To this end, the European Commission has identified five priority areas: **Cross-cutting deliverables; Economic development and market opportunities; Strengthening institutions and good governance; Connectivity, Energy efficiency, Environment and Climate change; Mobility and People-to-People Contacts.** In addition to the description of the state of play, the Report developed by Lulian Groza and Lulian Rusu- experts with the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) in Chisinau- contains a set of priorities for the year 2019. We also are providing you with a summary of the Report. See the full version of the



report at <http://ipre.md/2018/12/20/raport-de-monitorizare-participarea-republicii-moldova-i-CC%82n-cadrul-parteneriatului-estic-bilant-CC%A6ulanului-2018-20-de-livrabile-pae-ca-CC%86tre-anul-2020/?lang=en>.

Cross-cutting deliverables. The actions set for the cross-cutting areas registered generally an “on track” performance, with the gender equality and non-discrimination as well as media plurality and independence. The structural engagement with civil society has however registered only moderate progress. Although an important shift may be seen with respect to the support of the civil society in become more resilient, the communication with the public institutions has been at times difficult. Initiatives to restrict or control the activities of civil society representatives, including via last-minute legislative initiatives, have only

worsened the relations between the public institutions and the civil society representatives.

Key priorities for the remaining two years:

- Approval of the new law on non-commercial organizations and effective implementation of the EU support programs in Moldova related to the support of CSOs, mainly local and grass-root;
- Implementing measures to effectively increase participation of women in public life, prevent domestic violence and enhance the work of the Equality Council;
- Effective redress of the media ownership concentration, cartelization of the advertising market, as well as early warning and filtering mechanism to address disinformation, both from internal and external sources.

Economic development and market opportunities.

Actions to support to SMEs and trade & DCFTA implementation were assessed as “on track”. Key deliverables of the two sectors of intervention are an increased number of SMEs who are supported with funding and capacity building to boost their business opportunities as well as promising trade figures of the country generally (close to 70% of Moldovan exports directed to the EU in 2018), with new chapters of exports (equipment and machinery) having a lead record a 2-year period (26% out of the total share of exports in 2018).

The actions related to access to finance and job creation and local and regional level have registered a “moderate progress”. Access to finance is still not sufficiently vibrant, particularly for start-ups and SMEs, although actions were taken both to “clean” the banking system after the 2016, with EBRD acting as an important shareholder in two of the three commercial banks under “special supervision” from the National Central Bank and a new entrant from Romania (Banca Transilvania). The FDI did not reach yet the record USD 200 million registered back in 2014, although there have been both policy and implementing measures taken in 2016-2018 to improve the business climate in Moldova. Job creation at local and regional level has not registered sufficient pace. These outcomes are possible with strong local public authorities, which currently face excessive fragmentation, reduced population and very little own revenues and local capacities. Increased productivity of

created jobs is possible with smart specialization, which has not yet taken place. At local level production is mostly in the hands of large producers who generate low-competitive products, mostly raw materials and not final products for consumption.

Key priorities for the remaining two years:

- Alternative financing, in the form of venture capital and crowdfunding must be unlocked for SMEs, via policy development and implementation instruments. Attraction of capital from Moldovan citizens established abroad may further increase financing opportunities;
- Promote crediting in local currency, provided that proper currency stability is ensured via the National Central Bank and currency shocks are avoided by the Government with excessive expenditures and increased budget deficit;
- Promote the territorial-administrative reform to increase the capacities of local authorities to implement local policies for job creation, smart specialization, effective use of available infrastructure and resources;
- Refocus the public expenditure for rural and agricultural development to support innovative and high-revenue business models among SMEs and start-ups;
- Promote the digital markets integration via the cross-border e-Signature, e-Customs, e-Logistics, e-Health and further promote the elimination of roaming fees and harmonize international calls;
- Address the educational skills - market needs mismatch from the businesses point of view with a

structured appraisal of the needed skills and further liaison with the public sector (Ministry of Education, Culture and Research) on the adjustment and improvement of the curricula in schools and universities;

- Develop advanced statistical tools to measure the impact of the SMEs on the export (jobs, share, value, types of products, sectors of economy, innovation & research application) in the context of DCFTA implementation.

Strengthening institutions and good governance.

The implementation of key judicial reforms as well as the rule of law and anticorruption mechanisms have registered a “moderate progress”. These two sectors, crucial to guarantee attractiveness for business and fairness to citizens suffers from insufficient results. Actions were taken at policy level to improve the process of self-management of the judges’ and prosecutors’ bodies. The process of appointment of judges and prosecutors is still questioned in terms of fairness and merit-based promotion. Alternative evaluations show that the process of appointment of judges and prosecutors at times does not involve a merit-based approach and that there are still inconsistencies with respect to the way the results of the candidates are marked. The investigations initiated against judges and prosecutors, including those involved in high-profile baking fraud and Russian laundromat cases, are still not finalized.

The rule of law and anticorruption institutional framework registered important developments, with the creation of the National Integrity Authority (NIA), the Anticorruption Prosecutors’ Office (APO), the Asset

Recovery Office (ARO), the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), as well as approval of important anti-money laundering and illegal asset recovery legislation. At implementation level, important constraints may still be found. The NIA started to be operational only in 2018 and the review of the assets declarations and conflict of interest are mostly confined to sanctioning local and rayon level councilors. High-level public officials have not been subject to detailed assets reviews and investigations.

The implementation of public administration reform and the security actions have registered an “on track” assessment. Policy and implementation actions were taken to address the public administration reform. Separation of policy formulation & evaluation from implementation and more effective use of public resources to promote public policies was at the heart of the public administration reform in 2017. Exclusion of obvious situations of conflict of interest via transfer of implementation to subordinated Agencies and Inspectorates is under way, with some additional action necessary to transfer management functions from the Ministries. Integration of the delivery of public services was done via the creation of the Agency for Public Services (APS), which opened multifunctional centers in 2nd level centers of public administration.

The Security sector registered increased cooperation with EU specialized agencies. Practical cases of application of cooperation with counterparts from the EU and EU Member States to fight organized crime as well as money laundering have been registered. Hybrid threats

have been addressed with cooperation programs with the EU and other EaP countries.

Key priorities for the remaining two years:

- Fully capacitate the APO, ARO, FIU to effectively investigate high-profile cases of corruption, money laundering and develop internal instruments to manage frozen assets;
 - Negotiate and enforce international agreements, primarily with the EU and EaP countries to further exchange information on assets identification, freeze, enforcement of joint investigations on high-profile cases, including those of immediate interest for the community (the banking fraud and the Russian laundromat);
 - Clarify the process of appointment and promotion of judges based on the newly approved legislation on promotion of judges to ensure merit-based and transparent appointments;
 - Conduct the territorial-administrative reform, adjust public service delivery with the cooperation of the newly created local public authorities and the APS via the front/back office approach to bring closer the services to citizens;
 - Ensure effective follow-up of the decisions of the Chamber of Accounts, including criminal and administrative action;
 - Finalize the reform of intelligence-led policing and the creation of the unified crime analysis system;
- Develop a permanent Security Risk Assessment mechanism and effective early warning system of security related threats.

Connectivity, Energy Efficiency, Environment. The Extension of the

TEN-T core networks, Energy Supply, Energy Efficiency and Environment have all registered an assessment of “on track”. Actions were taken in all four priority sub-areas with important implications in the upcoming years. The Connectivity sector ensured progress in connecting to the TEN-T, recent decision from Romania was taken to build a new A8 motorway which will connect Moldova to the EU motorway network. Investment projects in infrastructure have been negotiated and initiated with the World Bank. Since 2012 Moldova is part of the Common Aviation Area (CAA).

Moldova transposed most of the 3rd Energy Package legislation. Gas connections between Moldova and Ukraine were approved, work on the interconnection Ungheni-Chisinau commenced and Romanian investment into the gas supply sector attracted. Electricity interconnections initiated with both Romania and Ukraine with an estimated completion of the projects in 2020.

Moldova committed to reduce CO₂ emissions, approved national legislation and strategic planning documents to promote renewable energy and increase efficiency of use of energy resources. Sector legislation was approved to promote the greening of the businesses, primarily of the SMEs. Specific legislation was promoted to prohibit export of timber. The Emerald Network sites in Moldova have increased with one unit (36 to 37) from 2016 to 2017.

Key priorities for the remaining two years:

- Implement the Railways concept of restructuring and fully transpose

transport-related EU legislation based on the AA;

- Finalize the interconnectivity with Romania and Ukraine on gas supply and electricity by 2020, including the gas pipeline to Chisinau;
- Ensure proper transposition and implementation of the 3rd Energy package legislation;
- Support more public authorities to implement Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans;
- Collect disaggregated data on greenhouse effect gas emissions and set in place the National Registry of emissions and transfer of pollutants;
- Promote the implementation of the Green Economy Promotion Support Program for SMEs;
- Promote the new Forestry Code and effectively enforce the legislation sanctioning illegal logging and export of timber.

Mobility and People-to-People

Contacts. After more than 4 years of Visa free regime with the EU Moldova registered insignificant rates of refusal of 0,3% and of illegal stay of 0,5%. The EU evaluated the progress on the Visa free dialogue as “on track”, however underlined the important of

implementing the anticorruption and anti-money laundering legislation. Cooperation was fruitful with EU agencies and over 100 projects on EU-Mobility Partnership have been implemented.

Dual education and VET have been supported by the EU and by GIZ. Since 2015 dual training is implemented in the Moldovan businesses based on the German practice. In 2018 the Government institutionalized the dual technical professional training. Unemployment rates among youth are still rather high. Moldova is part of the Creative Europe Network (CEN) since 2015 but did not use much of the resources to benefit from membership. A moderate participation of Moldovan researches was identified within the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA).

The participation of Moldovan Universities and research institutes within the research and innovation initiatives of the EU was moderate, although Moldova was the first of the EaP countries to become a full associated member of the EU Program Horizon 2020. In 2018 Moldovan organizations participated in 48

Horizon 2020 projects. The Moldovan National Research and Education Network was connected in 2018 to the GEANT Connectivity map. In October 2018 Moldova hosted the 3rd EaP E-infrastructure Conference EaPEC 2018.

Key priorities for the remaining two years:

- Effective implementation of the anticorruption and anti-money laundering VLAP benchmarks;
- Implement the joint border crossings with Romania and Ukraine;
- Measure the impact of the VET measures promoted in Moldova, as well as the internationalization of the Moldovan universities;
- Ensure more involvement in activities supported within the framework of CEN and MSCA;
- Adopt and implement the Road Map on the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Research Area for 2019-2021;
- Ensure a more active participation of the Moldovan researches, academia and NGOs in the Horizon 2020 and other EU Programs in the research and innovation areas.

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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