

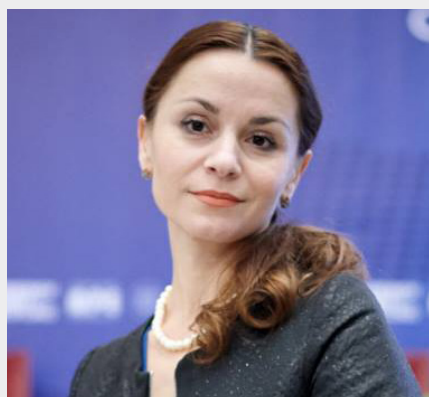
## Editorial

# Do we really want to give up on it?!

**Victoria Bucătaru,**  
executive director,  
Foreign Policy  
Association



**Natalia Stercul,**  
programme  
director, Foreign  
Policy Association



The uncertainty, together with the desire to prevent more obvious major democratic skirmishes, dominated the messages of the diplomats and experts - both national and international - who participated in the sixth European Integration Debate Forum held in Chisinau at the end of November. But before that, it was the citizens of the Republic of Moldova who, in the three *vox populi* that accompanied each of the three discussion panels, were asked about how they perceive the development of relations with the European Union. People have identified freedom of movement as an indisputable benefit but, at the same time, have highlighted the existing challenges, being firmly convinced that the phenomenon of corruption, the lack of an independent justice, and lack of a social and political cohesion are increasingly distancing both the country and its citizens from this democratic ideal.

"I am convinced this period will remain in the past," told us the Deputy Prime Minister Iurie Leanca, who was among the few Moldovan high-officials present

at the event. He showed confidence in a prosperous future of the relations of our country with the EU, despite the deep internal and bilateral crises, and the indication as to the possible suspension of the visa liberalization regime and of the Association Agreement (the main document guiding Chisinau's relations with the EU). This speaks either about the incoherence of the government or at least about the superficial understanding of the gravity of the situation, or about the fact that the authorities are trying, in a kind of tacit despair, to save the last bastion in the fight for euro-integration.

While four or five years ago Moldova was present on the Brussels agenda due to its successes and performance in the reform process, today, the EU Ambassador to Chisinau, Peter Michalko, speaks about the visibility of our country in an entirely different context and for absolutely other reasons ... The cancellation of the Chisinau mayoral elections' results put in the dark not only the domestic political class but also the entire judicial system of the country.

In addition, this so-called “electoral exercise” raised several questions and anticipated possible challenges and potential fraud attempts in the parliamentary elections scheduled for next year. It is precisely this that explains the frequent statements made also by HE Peter Michalko, that the 2019 parliamentary elections are going to be a real test of democracy for our country. Is this a simple warning message? Or is this an attempt to explain to us once again that the commitments for the European integration cannot be proven by changes to the Constitution, but rather by refraining from distorting the democratic processes and by conducting free and fair elections? Either way, it is clear that the European partners have made it clear to us the key principle they are going to take into account in the coming months and have shown us the red line they are not going to accept to be crossed - all political forces should refrain from using administrative resources and focus on a democratic and open process, respecting the will of the people and the multiparty system in the Republic of Moldova.

Contrary to the declarations of the government representatives, the businessman Ion Sturza, president of the Foreign Policy Association, has dispersed the illusion of free and fair elections. According to him, the European partners and many Moldovans are wrong in their hope that the February 2019 parliamentary elections are going to be democratic and fair. Actually, Mr Sturza has voiced an idea that that is slowly but surely penetrating people’s minds: that the upcoming elections are already being rigged - through the changing of the electoral system and the attitude towards the Opposition; through corruption and party switching, and even through a possible invalidation of their results if someone in particular doesn’t like them ...

Returning to a normal dialogue with the European Union is, however, a priority for those

who understand the real challenges to the security and integrity of the Republic of Moldova. Let’s not forget that we are talking about “returning” - for as much as you would like it, it is not possible to delete everything and start from scratch.

In the process of re-establishing the relations with the EU and bringing the Moldovan-EU dialogue to normality, we should take into account not only what we could gain from now on, but also what seems already normal and we certainly wouldn’t like to lose. Because, after the enormous effort - both institutional and societal - to adjust to the EU normative and value framework, today we don’t even realize how integrated and even dependent on this space we are! Therefore...

Are we ready to give up on the free movement? What about the European financial and technical assistance, which is so necessary for reforms and modernization of the country? Could we say ‘no’ to the chance of quality education that our youth benefit from through *Erasmus*, *Horizon 2020* or *Marie Curie* programmes? Can we afford the luxury of rejecting opportunities for international cooperation at all levels and in all areas, including the social and health areas? Do we want to abandon the infrastructure interconnections, cross-border cooperation and exchange of experience that are all generating new realities? Or do we want to give up on the facilities and partnerships offered by the Free Trade Zone? Probably not. And then...

Maybe we should consider what we could lose and where we will get? And each of us should think of how much the Euro-Atlantic partners have invested in each of us - and what do we offer in return? Thus, we will re-evaluate the reality and look differently at the way to the future we want, but also at the future itself.