

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

MONTHLY BULLETIN • FEBRUARY 2019 • NR.2 (156)

Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

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News in Brief



Once again US officials have univocally declared their support for the independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. It happened in Washington on the occasion of the recent visit to the USA of the Moldovan Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Tudor Uliianovschi. During his meetings with senior officials from the National Security Council, the State Department and the US Congress, emphasis was placed on the perspectives of the Moldovan-American collaboration, the consolidation of the Strategic Dialogue and the development of cooperation in the field of the information space protection. The meeting also examined the dynamics of regional and global developments in the context of the efforts directed at consolidating the democracy and economic development. Also, the head of the Moldovan diplomacy participated as main guest in a discussion organized by the Atlantic Council. Representatives of the US Administration and opinion-makers from Washington D.C. have reconfirmed the importance of maintaining our country on the US foreign policy priorities agenda. With reference to the forthcoming parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova, the US dignitaries have encouraged organization of free and fair elections according to the OSCE standards.



"Moldovan-Serbian relations are excellent, but the level of economic cooperation does not correspond to the possibilities," said Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Iurie Leanca, after the recent work visit to Belgrade. During the meetings of the Moldovan official with the Serbian President Aleksandr Vucic, Prime Minister Ana Brnabic and Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic, the parties agreed that today there is a need to strengthen trade and investment, but also to encourage businessmen to establish new ways of cooperation within the Free Trade Area with the EU that the Republic of Moldova is benefitting of. The officials agreed that the two states will continue to support each other within the international organizations in finding lasting solutions to the Transnistrian and Kosovo-Metohia conflicts. The Moldovan deputy prime minister expressed the interest of Chisinau, whose foreign policy priority is to join the EU, in the Serbian experience in the Euro-integration process. Similarly, Iurie Leanca stressed the importance of regional cooperation and the country's interest in being part of the cooperation mechanisms in the Western Balkans.



The Swiss Government will provide approximately six million euros to our country for the implementation of the second phase of the Programme "Capitalising on the Potential of Migration in the Republic of Moldova" within a Memorandum of Understanding between the State Chancellery and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Thus, the Diaspora Bureau will implement two projects that will help to improve the institutional framework, fight against poverty and strengthen the diaspora's capacity to actively engage in the country's social and economic development. The National Employment Agency will receive support to improve the reintegration through employment services by recruiting migrants returning home and to provide people with more chances for legal and temporary migration for work. At the same time, innovation and training projects will be carried out, as well as projects disseminating the best practices at the national and district level.

2019 Elections: again for the last time...



Sorina Ștefârță

The electoral campaigns - as long as they have existed and as much as the post-totalitarian societies like we are have learned about this

complex democratic process - seem to be more and more like bringing a child into the world. For, like probably there is no woman who, after giving birth, has not sworn by all the

saints that she will never venture again into this painful experience, I don't think we can find a party or a politician who haven't sworn on Saturday before the ballot that it's for "the

► last time” that they used unorthodox methods in order to occupy the much-coveted armchair of mayor, local councillor, deputy, or country president...

In both cases forgetting is taking its toll as it “is written in the human laws” as the poet used to say. Forgetting is especially part of the ‘political laws’, we would add, giving as an example the last parliamentary election campaign in Moldova. It’s another campaign out of which, irrespectively of the vote expressed on Sunday, February 24th, the Republic of Moldova is coming out tired, harassed, divided and disappointed by the multitude of politicians and their promises for something “better” they have had in recent months: from asphalted roads to doubled salaries; from doctors for everybody to cannabis for medical purposes (where perhaps these doctors don’t reach the patients ...); from Monaco brought to Orhei, to Jora de Mijloc extrapolated to the whole country. And why not if the mixed voting system and the money “saved” from “where is the stolen billion?” allow for any fantasies and any candidates?

What is de facto going to happen after 24 February 2019 and what is exactly the Parliament going to look like nobody ventures to say. The Moldavian voters are unpredictable. Perhaps only the opinion pollsters could tell us, but their results, the closer to the election day, the more ping-pong balls flying in every direction – so also here the situation is as usual... What distinguishes the current election campaign from the previous ones and what we didn’t or should have so that we manage to finally do it differently, learn from the new edition of the Newsletter.

An impoverished society from which the quality people run away cannot give optimistic results in the elections

Igor Boțan, political analyst, director of ADEPT



In order to take the pulse of the competition for the Parliament more accurately, the current edition of the Newsletter was developed at the last minute of the electoral campaign. And even if we all live in the Republic of Moldova, where “surprises” can occur even in the night before the vote, the basic trends are evident and some conclusions can be made. What are they; how did the society live with a new electoral race; and to what extent have the citizens been involved and consulted in this process? We talked about this with Igor Boțan, executive director of the Association for Participatory Democracy (ADEPT).

There are many signs that the citizens are frightened

■ ***Mr. Boțan, there haven’t been days, but counted hours left until the parliamentary election campaign is over. What is your forecast for Sunday, February 24th? And to what extent does it coincide with the results of the latest opinion polls?***

■ My mission is to try to analyse political and electoral processes. And here, of course, I also rely on the opinion polls. Only I’m very careful when I work with them, because the situation in the country has changed. Everything has become somewhat more difficult, there are many signs that the citizens are frightened and that means people are not really sincere when answering the sociologists’ questions. They fit their answers to the ears of the questioners, rather than express their attitude. This means that when we work with the polls’ results, we can expect, what is called, the “spiral of silence,” in which many experience a sort of fear or, let’s say, caution. I mean, they would vote for an opposition party, but they don’t want to say it openly. Hence, perhaps, the embarrassing situation when, on the same day of February 18th, one poll credited PSRM with 26 percent and another one -with 49 percent. By the way, I noticed that in the measurements made by the Association of Sociologists and Demographers, the

socialists, usually, always appear much better than their counter-candidates, just as the Euro-Asian direction is much more acceptable for our fellow citizens. This is a rather strange situation, since in all the other polls this ratio is already different for one and a half years, with the European integration being much more widely accepted by people.

■ ***These results may simply be the reflection of the sometimes contradictory nature of Moldovans, who don't see a problem travelling with the Romanian passport all over Europe and, at the same time, voting for the socialists?***

■ We can admit such behaviour, because what is lacking in our society - and that is what all citizens feel - is the notion of justice. And when people feel that there is no justice, or the potentates of the day do justice according to the rule "everybody is stealing, but we also give others from what we have stolen", there might exist a similar paradigm for a fairly wide segment of the population. Respectively, they can say one thing, because that's "good", but vote for another thing. We cannot ignore this and we have seen it very clearly in the 2016 presidential election. That's why I don't venture to make predictions. I can only talk about my expectations, which are rather pessimistic, because an impoverished society, a society out of which the quality people run away, cannot give optimistic results in the elections.

An avalanche of "charity" from charity party foundations

■ ***You have mentioned about fear, when people are afraid to answer honestly even in polls where they remain anonymous. Isn't this fear an effect of an unfair campaign? And, in***

this context, to what extent have the warnings coming from the EU, the USA, etc regarding the election test, which our country must pass – fair elections with equal conditions for all- been taken into account?

■ We had enough time to study our governors. It is the power and the ability to manifest themselves as a living political force that is important for them. And when you have such a challenge in front of you, can you think about a "fair campaign?!" Here is one example: the social shops. The authorities have ignored any attempt to shed more light on them - what are these social shops, and since when political parties can deal with commercial or charitable activity? Trade is not the prerogative of political parties, their mission is to have visions... PSRM has opened its mouth a little bit to say that the "Shor Party" is stealing from us, but shut it quickly down because, in principle, it is doing the same thing through the "Solution" or the First Lady's "From the Heart" Foundations. De facto, we see that three parties – all, surprisingly, socialist and social-democratic – apart from politics, are doing also charity work, and other things that do not really fit into the political activity. From this point of view, surely you are right. The citizens also see this - who the master is; who penalizes everyone; how much the government attacks the opposition and accuses it of treason against the state, as it was in the case of the "Open Dialogue" - and naturally they prefer to be less honest and open. That is why, in 2014, when the people felt freer, the opinion polls reflected, though at the limit, more accurately the citizens' voting preferences. But now we have 20% gap-anomalies, which is not normal.

■ ***Given this indictment, how high is the risk that the elections will not***

be recognized by the international community? For not only us see these anomalies but also the many observers who are already in Chisinau.

■ Everyone sees what kind of elections we are having. Administrative resources are being openly used. The state secretaries, a priori apolitical, are campaigning with the already famous blue bus. All sorts of post-factum holidays and reliefs are being invented ... Although the entire state administration, the ministers are busy with the campaign, the Government is assuming responsibility to Parliament for various laws. These are unthinkable things for a rule of law. In parallel, we are witnessing an avalanche of all sorts of electoral gifts- from cheap knick-knacks to wage increases. Mr Candu says that the Plahotniuc Foundation has provided various services to almost one million citizens of the Republic of Moldova. Mr. Shor declares that he "blessed" 300 thousand people in the country with cards for his social shops. Mr Dodon firmly claims that half a million people benefited from the services of the foundation led by his wife. There's never been anything like that! Where else, in which countries are the political parties affiliated with charity foundations? And how can the Opposition, in such a situation, say the elections are free and fair? These are unimaginable things.

■ ***In this situation, what is going to happen next Monday? They are talking again about protests...***

■ I believe, next Monday, there will be press conferences, where everyone will be highlighting the shortcomings of the campaign, will be making conclusions about "the level of democracy in the Republic of Moldova", but all are going to be polite and avoid calling things

their name, limiting themselves to recommendations on improving the legal framework. As for the protests, I'm not convinced they are of any use. We protested when the billion was stolen and exactly at that time, in the heart of Moldova, in the Orhei Codrii, Mr Ilan Shor won the mayoralty in Orhei in the first round. What is the point of protesting if those who have accumulated capital by unorthodox methods can buy the citizens, and the latter accept that? Also Mr Dodon has promised he'll protest if... he doesn't know what. But I have seen it very well how Mr Dodon protests – with permission from the police and ... not just that.

Europeans should demand from us to open all cupboards...

■ ***It seems the risk of total deterioration of relations with external partners in the case of fraudulent elections is not going to work, being just a scarecrow?***

■ I think, on Sunday, somehow traditionally, the appearances of free elections will be kept up. As a result, our foreign partners will also say that "it is the choice of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova". And they'll be right. Yeah, the conditions were harsh, but nobody put guns to people's heads. Whatever people sow, that they will reap. And they are going to conform to the people's will. After that they will remind us that the Republic of Moldova is a member of the Eastern Partnership and that there is an Association Agreement. They will take a break to see how the dialogue will be established for the creation of the parliamentary majority... After that they will enter a dialogue that will be focused on a new action plan for the

implementation of the Association Agreement. They will develop a new formula to help Moldova, including new conditionalities. Unfortunately, I think this is the scenario, but we cannot get annoyed with the situation as we cannot always demand from the whole world to solve our problems.

■ ***Is the European money going to come or come back?***

■ I think there will be new conditionalities. And the money will not come as it once did, especially that the governors have shown they don't really need such funding. And if so - because they found resources for gifts for the New Year's Eve and Easter, and also 200 MDL to pay for every child since birth until the age of 18, the Europeans and other development partners could ask a question as natural as legitimate: "Gentlemen, you are not lacking resources! It turns out the country has been stolen, also by the political elite, and now, when we closed your tap, you showed that you can find money for the elections! Let us count these resources and show everything you have in the cupboards! Perhaps, without our money, you will do better, using your brains and destroying the corruption nests - because you know where they are!" By the way, this would be an idea: before opening funding for the Republic of Moldova, Brussels should ask Chisinau to publish the extra funding sources and to cut off all channels through which the many is draining into the hairy hands of... And then maybe, indeed, we can start developing with our own forces without begging for money. Is this not the fourth way?

■ ***It's a beautiful hypothesis, but it seems less realistic than the one according to which the socialists***

could win the overwhelming majority. Would that be a catastrophe?

■ Also in 2001, when Mr Voronin won the legislative constitutional majority, they were discussing about a catastrophe. But, one year and a half later, he signed the decree on the European integration of the country and in May 2008 asked the EU to give us a chance to integrate with the Western Balkans... Mr Dodon seems to know this history very well and I would say he can anticipate things. He was in Munich and didn't attack the Association Agreement, on the contrary...; last summer at the Crans-Montana Forum, he announced he was working on a plan to join the European Union... And his socialists are not even revolting against it, which raises a big question mark. For Mrs Greceanii remains the president of the Party of Socialists, whose programme says: "Cancellation of the Association Agreement and adhesion to the Customs Union". They should at least call a congress to adjust their political programme to the new "realities", demonstrating that they are serious and don't play at both ends of the table.

So, the sky is not going to fall on the Earth if the socialists win, eventually. On the contrary, in order to maintain power, they will make concessions and try to strike a balance so as not to jeopardize the smooth functioning of the Free Trade Area, which is benefiting also the Transnistrian region. Moreover, at all economic forums, Mr Dodon is inviting the Belarusian and Russian businessmen to come to invest in Moldova and thus enjoy the benefits of free trade with the EU.

■ ***Regarding PSRM and its formal and informal leaders, how plausible is***

that the National People's Movement "Powerful President, strong State" launched in January, becomes a way of Igor Dodon' dissociation from the party that propelled him so that he can create a new, more modern, social-democratic party?

■ It is more of a plan to make sure that there are people who, at his first call, will take to the street. This is very simple: Mr Dodon fears he might be removed from the presidential office or that some of the socialist deputies might suddenly leave for another camp - and then he should at least imitate a kind of rebellion. But I don't think these people have the courage to face it.

People are simply taking revenge on the political class

■ **In the current campaign, emphasis has been more than ever, perhaps, placed on the need for integrity - starting with the establishment of ANI and ending up with investigations that give people the opportunity to get informed about a candidate's history and make an informed choice, respectively. Why is it so difficult with this?**

■ Those who thought it is going to be easy, were wrong. This integrity project is long-lasting, as long as citizens don't understand that those who govern must be clean. The problem lies in the citizens, on the one hand. And, on the other hand, there is a problems with the way they understood - or someone wanted them to understand - the role of the certificate of integrity. For this certificate has been issued to everybody who asked for it...

■ **And so, the name itself becomes improper...**

■ It is not of integrity, because it doesn't attest to whether one is of integrity or not, but it says that the institutions empowered to check your conflicts of interests have no claims on you ... Ideally ANI should have *de facto* and not only *de jure* the capacity to carefully study the statements - to observe the possible irregularities, take self-initiative actions and investigate thoroughly until it issues the final decision that can be attacked in court by the concerned person. But it seems ANI is not prepared for such a challenge, nor is the society - for a fully functional integrity institution of public utility. It doesn't mean, however, that it must be annihilated at this first failure. No! Society needs to discuss it and those who will come to Parliament should find solutions to this integrity mechanism as a matter of priority. And together with that, they should explain to us how can charity foundations act together with political parties; what happens with polarization and biased media; why can a politician be, at the same time, a media-tycoon and do propaganda for himself and his party? These questions have to be answered by the new MPs.

■ **If not, the citizens can trigger MPs' withdrawal mechanism...**

■ Sure, this is a very nice joke, just that. People don't understand that if, according to the Constitution, the elected representatives of the people have a representative mandate, that is, we have representative democracy, you cannot turn it into a democracy of "foremen". If you admit that the deputy may be withdrawn, you must prescribe in advance the reasons you are withdrawing the deputy

for. Otherwise, he\she will not be a representative of the people, but a "savior" for various local issues. What does the deputy, for instance, have to do with the garbage? The MPs should develop waste collection and recycling strategies at country level. So, the deputy's withdrawal is more of a bedtime tale, showing the quality of the political class, but also the quality of the so-called constitutional experts.

■ **I think they understand it very well that they are cheating on the people...**

■ I guess so too. But if they are cheating and the citizens are not retaliating ... I'm risking to say that this society is in a state of continuous degradation. Because skilled people leave and only the underdogs remain who, in a very specific manner, take revenge on everything and everyone: "You are all stealing, we know it, but if you give us something from what you stole, we'll see." As it happened in Orhei and Jora de Mijloc. This is also a signal for our development partners, who, somehow indirectly, being more indulgent toward the representatives of the political class, have contributed to this state of affairs in our country. Because as long as you give money – the European taxpayers' money! – to the Moldovan Government and don't regulate their spending, it is difficult to be totally absolved of responsibility. But there is also a good side to the current situation: things have been unveiled. So now we have a much better diagnosis for the country and its citizens.

■ **Hopefully, on Sunday, we will also get the treatment that is going to recover us. Thank you for the interview.**

Sorina Ștefârță

Editorial

Integrity as an empty electoral promise

Viorica Zaharia,
Chair of the Press Council, editor-in-chief of
the *Moldovacurata.md* portal

One of the words used in this election campaign more often than any other was certainly “integrity”. However, while some political parties have used this notion, at least at the declarative level, as a selection criterion for candidates in the list, others seem to have outdone themselves in proposing characters that are far from being innocent. Entering elections with candidates who have undergone criminal investigations, used fake diplomas, or spent public money to enrich the family businesses is a clear sign that the future governance is not going to be totally different from the current one, and given the government’s anti-corruption commitments from the recent years, we can say that we are witnessing a defiance of both voters and external partners. To what extent do this relate to the much-coveted - officially announced - efforts aimed at consolidating the democracy and creating an image of “honest player” for the country? I’m afraid we are dealing here with a rhetorical question.

There are at least three stakeholders who, throughout this electoral period and before the start of the parliamentary electoral campaign, have a say in the polemic about the integrity of the candidates: mass media, the parties, and the National Integrity Authority.

Mass media. Being one of its representatives, I will give the mass media a positive mark. In this campaign - probably more than in any other electoral campaigns - the media have emphasized the integrity of parliamentary candidates. The editorial staffs have thoroughly worked on integrity profiles and have brought to light everything relevant to the “political history” of the aspiring Parliament candidates: they have analysed their political trajectories, wealth, behaviour in public service, conflicts of interest, etc. The civil society, through actions such as the Civic Initiative for a Clean Parliament has developed, together with the lawyers, clear criteria that indicate whether a candidate can be considered of integrity or not.



The searching through archives has often revealed truly significant facts that, in other societies, could convince the voters to change their minds. Thus, a candidate from Glodeni was found to have used illegal workforce at his own enterprise having been fined for it by the Labour Inspectorate. In another case, it was discovered that a rayon president hired his daughter-in-law to work for the district council he was chairing and didn’t see a conflict of

interest in it. A third one took the press to court, refusing to deliver information of public interest. So, being helped by journalists, the parties could have easily ‘cleaned up’ their lists had they had a minimum commitment to integrity and fairness. But no one went to such lengths.

Parties. The presence of compromised candidates on party lists should be understood as a clear ‘promise’ of the parties to respect the rules of ‘political correctness’ – to be read as ‘political clan’ - when in government. For the more candidates of blurred integrity on the lists, the clearer the party’s ‘commitment’ to (not to) implement real anti-corruption reforms and to (not to) promote people with compromised reputation. In the case of the Democratic Party, for example, we expected that at least people such as Chiril Gaburici who – even proved by the Prosecutor’s Office - used a fake high school diploma will not be on the party list. The integrity filter – only if there was such a thing while establishing the party lists – didn’t work in the case of lower-rank leaders either: mayors, district presidents, or head of agencies, all involved in conflicts of interest. About Grigore Repeșciuc, PDM candidate in Căușeni, for example, the press learned in the middle of the campaign that, being mayor of the locality, he concluded contracts with his family and hired his son-in-law as driver, preparing him as a successor to the town hall.

Neither the lists of other parties are shining clean. The socialists’ lists are full of people who have no plausible answer to the question of where they got tens of thousands of dollars donated to the party in recent years, for some were unemployed and others worked exclusively for the state. There are also candidates who have resorted to fictitious

marriages to obtain land plots at a lower price... Also the “Shor” Party seems to have hand-picked its candidates in the image of its leader who has serious integrity problems.

In the case of the Opposition, the situation is different, although in at least several cases the filters didn't work there. Otherwise, how can we explain the presence among the current candidates of the judge Domnica Manole who, despite her civic and political position, has a case of non-declaration of assets and another case of violation of professional ethics?

The withdrawal of 'sinful' candidates from the lists would have been a gesture of political goodwill, but it seems that all the political parties from the electoral race have overlooked these facts, probably counting on the 'anomaly' of the Moldovan electorate who used to vote without any problems even for candidates under criminal investigation. Although the comparison is not proportionate, let us remember how, at the 2017 presidential elections, the French voters penalised the candidate who had hired his wife for his parliamentary office!..

ANI. Created at the end of 2017 after a tedious reformation process of the old CNI (National Centre for Integrity), the National Integrity Authority (ANI) that was to revolutionize the national integrity system soon became 'a great disappointment.' From a rather inefficient institution - but at least transparent as CNI - we have achieved an absolutely inefficient and completely closed for the press structure. In 2018, the ANI was sued by the Association of Independent Press for several refusals to respond to requests for access to information, situations that didn't happen during the CNI. The institution didn't come up with an explanation even in full swing of the campaign, when the public opinion was wondering why ANI was issuing discretionarily certificates of integrity – despite the fact that, as it turned out quickly, they had no value for the electoral process of the candidate...

Introduced for the first time in the current election, this document has been seen, including by some politicians - who have later withdrawn their statements - as a filter for compromised candidates. Very soon, however, the certificate turned out to be nothing but a formality that no one needed, but which, of course, consumed the time, effort and money of the National Integrity Authority. In the Activity Report for 2018, ANI President, Rodica Antoci, announced that in these elections the institution issued 1261 certificates of integrity. However, the candidates are not more integral and the Central Election Committee didn't reject any application for registration because of the content of the certificate. On the

contrary, ANI demonstrated its loyalty to the Power when, for similar situations, it issued different certificates for a 'Power protégé' and for an Opposition representative.

It is clear that the people concerned knew from the start that the certificate ... didn't certify anything. However, according to the law, it must reflect conflicts of interest, incompatibilities, information about undeclared assets found by CNI/ ANI regarding the applicant over the past three years. As the institution was under reformation in this period- as it was obvious that only a period of seven to eight months from the years 2015-2016 was considered- none of the parties' important figures were checked by CNI.

In other words, the core mission of ANI is not issuing integrity certificates, but the prevention of corruption by checking the assets and interests of civil servants. Despite the generous funding from the Budget and external projects, ANI has not shown at least that it wants to deal with it. It hasn't delivered yet (more than one year after the reform) any consistent decision regarding incomes, unjustified wealth or conflicts of interest. While the press was publishing investigations under big headlines, ANI kept silent. At the presentation of the 2018 report, asked how many times ANI went on checks following the media reports, Rodica Antoci replied: twice. It is not known what those are, but it is certain that in two cases reported by the Clean Moldova portal (in the autumn 2018) ANI has initiated controls. So it means in all other cases reported by the mass media, ANI didn't take any action.

These results of the ANI's activity wouldn't perhaps generate revolt if there wasn't enough support for the given institution. Only from a World Bank project, for example, 2.162 million MDL was allocated for the purchase of the electronic system for online submission of income and interest declarations. To these figures is added seven million MDL, which is paid from the Budget for the digital signatures distributed to the civil servants. In addition, let's not forget the countless training and study visits for the ANI employees funded by external partners.

In these circumstances, when the main state structure with the integrity control function has been inert in verifying and sanctioning candidates' abuses both before and after the elections, there should have been some internal mechanisms within the parties. As the latter haven't proven their effectiveness, we are going to see how the third mechanism - the vote-based punishment applied by the electorate on the basis of the information it received through the press in the current electoral campaign – is going to work.

We can talk about an honest campaign when the conditions are equal for everyone

Pavel Postică, programme director at Promo-Lex Moldova

Monitoring of electoral campaigns - whether it is done by local observers or international missions, or whether it targets the whole process or only some of its components, such as mass media - has become a practise for the Republic of Moldova. The electoral campaign for the February 24th parliamentary elections, which officially started on January 24th, but de facto started at least one year ago, is also being followed closely. One of the organizations that has been monitoring the national electoral process for at least a decade is Promo-Lex. This time, however, its members have come to the public attention not only due to the reports they have produced, but also because of the objections of lack of objectivity brought to them by some political actors - especially the Democratic Party of Moldova, in response to the conclusions of the first monitoring report, which stated the PDM had taken advantage of its role of ruling party in order to secure unfair pre-electoral advantages over its competitors. How was the electoral campaign from the observers' perspective, we can find out from Pavel Postica, programme director at Promo-Lex Moldova.

■ **Mr. Postica, have you reconciled with the PDM?**

■ We neither quarrelled nor reconciled. There have been some



accusations, which the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) has publicly formulated on several occasions. It happened last autumn for the first time, when the representatives of this party spoke, more generally, about the involvement of civil society in the electoral campaign. No names were given then, they only insisted on the idea that the civil society, being paid from abroad, is influencing the electoral campaign. Later on, they reacted to our first pre-election report, blaming us for not being objective, etc. We responded through a public statement. The third attempt to intimidate us was the PDM letter sent to embassies and development partners, accusing us of having no evidence to confirm what we write in the reports, of not being impartial and of not paying attention to events that actually happened outside of the reporting period. In turn, we visited all the electoral contestants and talked with them. We have once again explained to them the methodology

and logic of the monitoring that Promo-Lex has been doing for ten years already. Otherwise, every electoral contestant is entitled to state his/her position.

The reports are taken into account when they fit political interests

■ **However, as far as I remember, it is for the first time that a political actor chose to put monitors in their place rather than analyse its potential mistakes.**

■ Never since 2009 has any electoral contestant attacked us in the way it has happened in the current campaign. I have qualified this as intimidation of the observation mission and I have spoken openly about that. For one reaction has followed another: three statements of the PDM, then somehow a similar reaction of a member of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), Iurie Ciocan. According to them, we shouldn't produce interim reports, but only final post-elections ones, giving an evaluation to the entire electoral process. They tried to assure us that any violation can be repaired. Perhaps this is also explained by the fact that they have requested information about the violations found by us - either to repair them or to try to explain that they were not violations.

■ ***In general, how much do they take into account your reports and the reports of other monitoring organizations? Because the mission of a monitoring report, as far as I understand it, is to determine avoidance of mistakes in the future by pointing out to such mistakes...***

■ Everything is relative, especially in the case of reports on the electoral segment. In 2014, for example, the Promo-Lex reports served as a ground for the Constitutional Court to reject the recount of votes demanded by the Reformist Communists. On several occasions, including on the basis of our reports, we have succeeded in promoting certain legislative changes, the most recent example being the permission to campaign on election day. It is a matter we have been promoting since 2009, but they have done it now, only in half measures. Because you cannot allow electoral campaigning on the “zero” day and, at the same time, prohibit its financing on that day, for the financial reports have to be submitted on Friday before the elections... So, the reports are taken into account, more or less immediately, when they fit a political interest.

■ ***What about political parties - if is to disregard the possible annoyances of some actors on this segment - how receptive are they?***

■ Also in their case the things are relative. If, for example, we had no MDL reported as travel costs in 2009, there are parties today that declare their own cars that they use in the campaign. And there’s nothing illegal

here, it’s important to be clear. There are parties that take account of our recommendations and others that are ignoring us. The Communists, for example, have submitted several draft laws based on our reports...

This invisible intimidation has deep effects...

■ ***How do you see the 2019 Elections of which has remained very little?***

■ It is very little time left until election, but it’s not over yet! But some conclusions, indeed, can already be made, and namely: this campaign has been marked by the use of administrative resources, by electoral gifts, by not declaring all expenses and by intimidations of both electoral candidates and voters. To these can be added hate speech and some purely technical deficiencies, especially linked to the electoral rolls and electoral litigation. In this context, mention should be made that intimidation took various forms – from beatings in Edinet and broken windows in Soroca to ordinary incidents at the meetings with voters, while some people who sympathize with certain parties and who have some authority in the locality, simply come and interrupt the events through various tricks and to the limit of harassment. The international observers almost don’t notice such situations - people are not bleeding and are not shooting... But this invisible intimidation has deep effects, being also reflected in the polls, according to which 70% of respondents are afraid to speak publicly about their political preferences. And this leads to the fact that the margin of error in the case of political issues is excessively high.

■ ***In fact, over the last few weeks, opinion polls figures have flown like ping-pong balls, always changing... What can we expect on February 25th?***

■ No one can say that and neither me. Certainly, the polls show the trend, and namely that between three and seven political parties will get into the Parliament.

■ ***If we were to take the worst four violations you found in the electoral process, the first mentioned was the use of administrative resources. It’s been a problem since the independence of the Republic of Moldova. Why does it persist? Is it a matter of unresolved legal loopholes or?...***

■ This phenomenon is not new, but it’s never been as obvious as in the current campaign. This year, however, we can speak of at least two ramifications when it comes to using the administrative resources. The first is the use of public spaces during working hours - because whether we like it or not - the biggest employer in the Republic of Moldova is the state. So most voters can be found in public institutions and enterprises, and the most convenient thing to do is to meet them at the working place. Sometimes people go to such meetings voluntarily and other times they are invited under the pretext of a meeting. De facto, it happens during working hours, although they formally say they do the meetings during the lunch break ... The second so-called ramification, which stands out, is the involvement of state secretaries in the campaign - those secretaries, who replaced the deputy ministers appointed on political terms. Being a key element of the

central public administration reform, the state secretaries are presumed to be apolitical actors and what we are seeing today in the blue campaign buses...

Yes, the Electoral Code allows any citizen to discuss any political aspect. But here we have a problem of organized campaign. However, they are not registered as members of the candidate's support team or haven't resigned temporarily from their jobs for the campaign period etc. In parts, perhaps, including retrospectively, certain formalities have been observed, but the general impression is that both the legal and the moral part have been overlooked.

The Orhei scenario has been taken over by other parties

■ ***This massive and almost defiant use of administrative resources passes lightly into another Moldovan phenomenon - the electoral gifts...***

■ They are even more visible and are a combination of gifts and use of administrative resources. These are salary increases that were not planned in the Budget, free medicines, doctors and homes for everyone. Yes, the legislation of the Republic of Moldova does not prohibit such, but at the same time there are international standards, which we claim to respect, according to which you can make such gestures only at certain times, long before the elections. In addition, obviously, these gifts influence people's opinion. And if our legislation is not perfect, it doesn't mean we do not have to aim for something better. That is precisely why, during

monitoring, we are guiding ourselves by these international standards.

■ ***So the gift doesn't just mean a bag of rice on which "Shor" is written ... Why do the relevant institutions such as ANI fail to see it?***

■ If we are talking about this desideratum called "integrity", with reference to ANI we have to understand a few things: 1) it is a new institution; 2) there is no very clear mechanism for exchanging information between the state institutions that are responsible for a certain type of integrity (Central Electoral Committee, Information and Security Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Tax Authority ...) and transmitting all data to ANI. Respectively, empty certificates are being issued. Here is another issue regarding the double necessity of this certificate: for the electoral body in order to get registered and for the public. That is, if this certificate indicates that you haven't paid taxes or have been convicted, the citizen should know about it so that they can make an informed opinion.

■ ***Is it possible that the scenario from Orhei/ Jora de Mijloc be replicated in other localities of the Republic of Moldova?***

■ I think it's already being replicated. Only it is very complicated to estimate how much exactly they will spend and how much they have de facto spent in the single-mandate constituencies. For here, I think, the big problem is that you can talk about an honest campaign when the conditions are equal for everyone. There is, for example, a minimum threshold of 100,000 MDL, which you cannot exceed. However,

the reports on Jora de Mijloc show that they spent well beyond the threshold there. Now there are suspicions that also in the current campaign, in some constituencies, much more resources are being spent than allowed by the law. More parties are doing it, using the same scheme.

■ ***To what extent did the change of the electoral system and namely the mixt voting system open the door to, let's say, more exotic or more controversial characters into the politics?***

■ If we look a little bit in time, we will see that in all the elections we've had situations when the parties made changes to the lists at the last minute. And then, as now, they were saying the new entrants were not without sins... That is why I would not blame the mixt electoral system, especially since there is a national list. And I think we have to wait until February 25th to speak about it less hypothetically.

■ ***Has this campaign been uglier and dirtier than the previous ones?***

■ There have been more gifts and more administrative resources used. Otherwise, I think there were both good and bad things about it; both developments and involutions. In addition, we cannot compare the 2009 with the 2019 elections – the techniques and technologies have also changed. But it is natural to want, as a society, something better.

■ ***We wish the entire Promo-Lex team a fruitful and incident-free election on Sunday, and thank you for the interview.***

Sorina Ștefârță

Expert opinion



Nicu Popescu: **„These elections are the most unpredictable of all that the Republic of Moldova has ever had”**

Internal general elections are always an event that has an external impact, because apart from the policies that are going to be promoted internally by the new government, the election results are going to influence the foreign policy direction of the country in the next four years, as well as the regional situation. As it turns out, it seems natural that since 1990, none of the electoral campaigns in the Republic of Moldova could neglect the geopolitical stake. Sometimes being real, the latter was most often invented, in the absence of real solutions to even more real problems... The current race to Parliament in which as a result of the change of the electoral system both parties and individual citizens have ventured into, is no exception in this sense.

We will know already on February

24th about who was able to get on board and who remained on the shore... The same evening, we are going to find out to what extent Moldovans have been scared by the danger of Russian tanks or, on the contrary, by the new wave of “30 thousand Syrians”. Until then, however, we are inviting you to read what Nicu Popescu, political scientist, senior analyst at the EU Institute for Security Studies in Paris and associate lecturer at Sciences Po/ PSIA, thinks about possible post-election developments. Mention should be made that this article is an adapted version of Nicu Popescu’s interview for the Radio Free Europe from February 18th. Moldovan President Igor Dodon’s presence at the recent International Security Conference in Munich served as a starting point in the discussion. The head of state wanted to promote his

foreign policy concept of a “balance between the East and the West”, but has mentioned - for the first time so clearly - that he is not going to endanger the Association Agreement with the European Union.

About the margin of economic manoeuvre

The foreign policy preferences of President’s Dodon is no surprise for Moldova’s European partners. And there is one more thing which is evident for everyone - that the political statements of the Socialist Party run counter to the economic realities, given that about 60% of the country’s foreign trade is with the EU and (even if this figure differs from one year to the next) and only about 10% is with Russia. This thing is severely limiting the margin of economic manoeuvre of

the Republic of Moldova, because any attempt on the Association Agreement with the EU would mean immediate economic collapse, hundreds of thousands of job losses, posing risks for not only economic, but also social and political upheaval. Therefore, commercial and economic dependent processes are limiting the margin of manoeuvre of any political actors in Chisinau, including of those who want a stronger rapprochement of the country with Russia. A second element that is drastically restricting Mr Dodon's foreign policy options is the Ukrainian factor as any approach to Russia can only be made with the implicit agreement of Ukraine. For, in fact, Kiev has a right to veto the development of Moldovan-Russian relations when it comes to some very concrete things, such as the export of goods by rail or by trucks to Russia.

About the post-electoral "adjustments"

The fact that Igor Dodon wants good relations both with the East and the West is not a surprise, because, in fact, most of the political forces in Chisinau have always said this. The so-called pro-European or the so-called pro-Russian forces have always watered down their political discourse and behaviour after being elected - those who have been elected on a pro-Russian platform have become less pro-Russian and more centrist, while the pro-Europeans became less pro-NATO and more open to dialogue with the Russian Federation. So, in this

sense, Igor Dodon's behaviour is not different from the behaviour of all the political leaders who have governed the Republic of Moldova for the last almost 30 years. This is because, as a matter of fact, this population wants to have decent relations with both the East and the West. At the same time, the disproportionate geography of President Dodon (the immense gap between visits to Moscow and visits paid to other states) is not just about his choice, being explained by the fact that he is more often welcomed in the Kremlin than at the Élysée Palace in France or in the UK, or in Berlin.

About unpredictable forecasts

The truth is these elections are the most unpredictable of all that the Republic of Moldova has ever had, because everything depends on the alignments and coalitions that will be created in Parliament after the elections, especially because of the MPs who will be elected in single-mandate constituencies. Nobody has the network to understand, predict or make surveys in order to understand the concrete perspectives in each constituency for each political candidate. So, in this sense, we cannot predict at this stage the majority that is going to control the Parliament in Chisinau.

About geopolitical fantasies

The realities of any country, including of the Republic of Moldova, are determined and influenced by

two scenes or two fronts, two battlefields. One is related to the political positions of certain leaders: campaigning, statements, disputes, talk shows, electoral programmes that change from day to day or from week to week and which are, in fact, very volatile. At the same time, there is a second stage where the trends are very slow, but very well structured and hardly reversible. This is related to the country's economy, state development and the degree of democratic education of the population. From the economic point of view, the Republic of Moldova, as I said, is very dependent on the European Union and I don't think that the country's future leaders have the political and economic freedom to do whatever they want, regardless of the mandate and party programme they will come with in the Parliament. No economy can afford to turn its back to a market absorbing 60 per cent of its exports and that hundreds of thousands of people depend on. Look at how complicated the divorce of the UK from the European Union is – not even London can afford not to have a functioning agreement with the EU... All the more so the Republic of Moldova doesn't have the luxury to follow the geopolitical fantasies of one or another political actor without taking into account the possible economic consequences.

About federalization scenarios

There is such a risk - that the next parliamentary majority will try to change the internal policy balance

in the Republic of Moldova through federalization and an “on paper” reintegration with the Transnistrian region. But this would blow up the whole political system and all these semi-balances established over the past 30 years. At the same time, regarding the preferences of the population, we know very well that people don’t want to make major concessions to the Transnistrian region. Everybody wants reintegration, but one in which Chisinau will remain dominant over the Transnistrian region. This is not possible as neither Moscow nor Tiraspol would accept such an arrangement. So, indeed, there is a risk of federalist movements, but we also have the position of the opposition and public opinion which are very hostile to fundamental concessions for the left bank. In concrete terms, if this reintegration

occurs, it is inevitable that some of the very important positions in the state will be offered to the Transnistrian region; there will probably be a referendum, another Chamber of Parliament may be created, and new elections may be organised. I don’t think these things are feasible and that the public opinion could accept such a profound reformation of the Republic of Moldova as to have representatives from Tiraspol in the leading positions of the country - parliament speakers, prime ministers, deputy ministers...

About possible destabilization announced by the Russian foreign office

The problem of Russian diplomacy is that the value of its words has dropped a lot, which is why it is

taken less seriously than ten years ago, for example. These statements are part of a rather aggressive and rather agitated style, and can be interpreted as a kind of threat, but also as a kind of ordinary anti-Americanism that the Russian Foreign Ministry produces on every current dossier. Once Chisinau entered the electoral period, it also entered the map of Russia’s quite unfriendly statements. But if we look a little more globally, we can see that they are the daily product of the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Press Department, and even if there is nothing good in them, everyone has become accustomed to them and treats them with a certain dose of scepticism.

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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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