

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 Mădălin Necșuțu, editor-coordinator

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News in Brief:



President Maia Sandu stated on Monday, August 23, in a speech held in Kiev on the occasion of the launch of the "Crimea Platform", that the Republic of Moldova will support the territorial integrity of Ukraine. "Moldova has been and will continue to be your reliable partner. We support the Resolution 68/262 "Territorial integrity of Ukraine" of the United Nations General Assembly, as well as its subsequent resolutions. The Republic of Moldova is a state devoted to peace and peaceful, diplomatic solutions. As a country, we have always depended on the regional rule-based security order. This order has been in jeopardy for some time. Undermining the rules enshrined in the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter for a New Europe and other fundamental documents of international law is a threat to the security of all. The international order based on rules, not the brutal use of force, is the only basis on which a peaceful and prosperous region can be built, in the interest of all", said Maia Sandu. The "Crimea Platform" is a Kiev initiative aimed at drawing the attention of the international community and at the same time seeking international support for the recovery of this illegally annexed territory by Russia in 2013.



President Maia Sandu marked on August 23 the Day of Commemoration of the Victims of All Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes, established in August 2019 by the Government she led at the time. "Our country thus joined the decision of the European Parliament in 2008, which declared August 23 - when, in 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact - as the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Fascism and Communism", wrote Maia Sandu on her Facebook page. The head of state also spoke about the victims of Stalinist deportations and those of Nazi concentration camps, about those who suffered from political repression, died during the organized famine or were exterminated for religious and racial reasons. "Tens of millions of people were deprived of their liberty, tortured and killed just because they fell hostage of ideologies for which human life had no value," she added.



About percent of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova think that the current orientation of the Republic of Moldova is towards the EU, according to an opinion poll conducted by CBS-Research at the command of the NATO Information and Documentation Center in Moldova. Russia was mentioned by 9 percent of respondents and Romania by almost 5 percent. Also, the Russian Federation is the biggest threat to national security, according to a survey that measured the population's perception of the security and defense system of the Republic of Moldova. The top also includes: terrorist groups, NATO and the United States. In case of security issues, respondents are of the opinion that these could come from Romania, Russia and the EU. The survey is part of a larger project carried out by the NATO Information and Documentation Center in Moldova.

The Republic of Moldova under the sign of chances to overcome the endless transition of the last 30 years



30 years after the declaration of independence, the Republic of Moldova is still struggling with an endless period of transition. From leaders who did not rise to the status of statesmen, to rapacious leaders and businessmen who entered politics to protect their pecuniary interests, the Republic of Moldova has seen them all in the last 30 years.

While in the first decade of the existence of Republic of Moldova as a subject of international law after the

declaration of independence from the USSR we can speak more or less of political dilettantism and lack of vision, in the second decade dominated by Vladimir Voronin's communists we can talk about a period of laying the foundations of the kleptocratic state, one dominated by a president with dictatorial powers in internal leadership and hesitant in foreign policy.

The clumsy political ballet between East and West has left Moldova in a grey area of political

uncertainty. Led by the principle invented by the former communist president Vladimri Voronin of the "gentle calf" with two mothers, Chisinau failed to cut a firm path in the medium term.

The April 7 revolution recorded only a repositioning of internal forces and a false impression of external reorientation. The compromises of the three Alliances for European Integration (AIE) have revealed only internal struggles to control

► the country's cash flows, increased corruption and plunge of the country into an indescribable slump.

The idea of European integration has been compromised by the quasi-corruption installed in the Republic of Moldova and the plundering of state resources by the leaders of these allegedly pro-European parties. The European path of the Republic of Moldova has been ridiculed, and the establishment of the Plahotniuc-Dodon binomial in 2016 marked the beginning of a new political cycle vitiated by kleptocratic interests.

Subsequently, the fall of the Pavel Filip government in June 2019 only temporarily brought an oasis of hope. The compromise alliance between the Socialist Party and the ACUM Bloc has collapsed after only five months. Meanwhile, the Socialists seized the key positions in the state, expelling officials loyal to Plahotniuc, under the pretext of removing the "state from captivity." Instead, they installed their people. Pro-European forces were thrown into opposition, and a new couple took over the reins of power through a Dodon-Shor majority.

A first sense of the pro-European revival came only after 15 November 2020, when Maia Sandu won a landslide victory in the presidential elections over Igor Dodon, both in the country and in the diaspora. The score was overwhelming, and the election of Maia Sandu has opened the game for early parliamentary elections.

The desire of Maia Sandu and PAS has materialized quite quickly, thus in April 2021, the Constitutional Court finally gave the green light to organize the parliamentary elections that were won by Maia Sandu and PAS through a practical extension of the confidence vote given to the pro-European forces last autumn.

However, power also comes with a high responsibility. And the goal of pro-European forces should be the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU signed in 2014, deep reforms in all areas and especially in the area of justice, and adding some well-being in the lives of citizens in order to move to the final phase of this endless transition that has been going on for 30 years. The Republic of Moldova only needs to keep this way, at least for the next electoral cycle.

Mădălin Necșuțu

We hoped to get rid of the Soviet power, but this did not happen because the 'Empire' was in us

Vasile Șoimaru, PAS MP and signatory of the Declaration of Independence



The MP of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), Vasile Șoimaru, has shared with us a series of memories related to the moment of declaring the independence of the Republic of Moldova from the Soviet Union. As a deputy of the first Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and signatory of the Declaration of Independence, Vasile Șoimaru made an arc over time and told us about the backstage and the general context of 27 August 1991. Vasile Șoimaru has returned today to politics and has as political goals many of the dreams he had 30 years ago. We are inviting you to read the most important extracts from the discussion with him:

■ What memories do you have of 27 August 1991 and could you explain a little bit about the context in which the break-up from the USSR took place?

■ It should have been an inspiring moment, but I don't know why we in the Republic of Moldova ended up voting among the last in the USSR for the declaration of independence. The Moscow coup began on 19 August 1991, and we voted for independence only five days later. Only a few countries have voted for independence after us. Even Ukraine did this one day before us.

There have been mentioned several reasons for that but I think the main issue was that there was no one to write the draft of Declaration of Independence. Until the diplomat Aurel Preda from Bucharest came and did that. He was a great diplomat and patriot. He should have remained Romania's first ambassador to Chisinau, but I don't know why the authorities in Bucharest didn't like him. He was probably a too straightforward person.

There have been several attempts to draft the Declaration of Independence

before Aurel Preda but none was successful. And the diplomat Aurel Preda saved the situation. However, others took the credit for the 'copyright' of this Declaration of Independence.

Aurel Preda has drafted the Declaration of Independence so that based on it you can unite with Romania tomorrow. The unification was not achieved then because of the then Romanian president Ion Iliescu. Snegur was second in this matter. If Iliescu had not had the fear of Gorbachev then, things could have been different. And Iliescu could not do this, because they did not allow him from Moscow.

Transition and opportunism

■ What was the atmosphere back then and what were the people's aspirations?

■ We were hoping to get rid of the Soviet power, but we haven't for a single moment. We couldn't get rid of it, because the 'Empire' was in us. The declaration of independence was voted and signed by 277 deputies, while the anthem "Awaken thee, Romanian!" was voted by 304 deputies.

The anthem was then voted also by those who were against independence. They didn't necessarily vote because they knew the meaning of the lyrics, but they just liked it. As I've told you, the Declaration of Independence was voted by 277 people, but then a strange number of 278 appeared. Then, the Speaker of the Parliament, Alexandru Moşanu, announced 277 people who voted, but now in all open sources the figure of 278 is mentioned, which is not correct. This addition can be explained by the fact that, later, the deputies who voted for the declaration were awarded the Order of the Republic, the highest distinction in the state.

Some of those who signed the Declaration of Independence at that time also became honorary members of the Romanian Academy, directors at the Romanian Cultural Institute, etc. Others got rich and others became communists and so on. These are all the people who made the Independence. Others, as was the case of Igor Dodon later, have continued having good relations with Moscow, which brought them benefits. There is also a category of people who have benefited simultaneously from Moscow and Bucharest. And some of them voted for President Vladimir Voronin in April 2005.

In conclusion, not much has changed since then. We consider ourselves independent, but, economically, we are not. Today, we are still heavily dependent on the Russian gas, for which we pay Gazprom higher prices than Germany or any other EU country. However, I believe that the independence of the Republic of Moldova was subsequently stolen twice. The first time in 1994, when the agrarians came to power, a kind of masked communists. They were the ones who included in the Constitution the Article 13 which refers to the 'Moldovan language' and that divided the society. The consequences of this decision can be seen even today.

Still today we remain divided, including because of this article 13. If we had five more votes now, in addition to the 63, we could have changed the Constitution. Unfortunately, these five votes were snatched from the PAS by the so-called nationalists in Bucharest. Thus, we could have solved this problem once and for all, because when the elections come, it automatically reappears and divides people.

■ What were people hoping for 30 years ago, Mr. Soimaru? Why didn't they succeed and who were the actors who could do more for the Republic of Moldova?

■ They were hoping for a better life and more freedom. Many people were convinced that the unification with Romania would finally take place. However, I think many of the political leaders of that time were not clean and we could see that later, not on 27 August 1991.

In 1994, the agro-communists who played the 'Empire' game slowed us down, and our independence was stolen for the second time in 2001, when Voronin came to power. However, the worst things happened for the Republic of Moldova in 2011-2012, when the Alliance for European Integration (AIE) came to power, led by Plahotniuc, Filat and Ghimpu. This is the third political group which stole the independence of the Republic of Moldova. Nights in a row they have voted for corruption schemes.

Economic problems and causes of impoverishment of the Republic of Moldova

■ What has happened to the economy in the last 30 years?

■ It has all been destroyed. Nothing good happened. In 1989, we reached the highest economic level. Then came the huge downturn in the economy. The Gross Domestic Product has decreased three times in volume until 1999. In about 10 years, it decreased, as I was telling you, three times.

The main reasons for that is the transition period, but first of all it is the political leaders that are to be blamed. In June 1992, Valeriu Muravschi's government was ousted, and another government led by Andrei Sangheli was parachuted from Moscow. That was a mediocre government, consisting of only four intellectuals, and they could not change anything. Thus, until 1997-1998, that government had a disastrous effect on the country's economy. There has

been a drastic decline from which we cannot recover still today. Today, after 30 years since independence, we have not even reached the level we had in 1989.

The new government needs an annual increase of 12 percent to reach the level of 1989 in the next four years. Unfortunately, we live in the poorest state in Europe. We are at the level of Ukraine, that it is still stronger as a state. We used to be twice as rich as Albania, but now they have left us behind. That's where we have gotten to. They have two or three highways, and we're barely repairing the roads here. We are kept in poverty, because in poverty we vote for the past. People are voting for communism in this difficult situation we are in now.

If we manage in the following four years to do something serious, to start projects for the population, to change maybe the railway track width so as Chisinau could connect to the railways in Europe, then things will change for the better. We need railways, which is the cheapest means of transport. We have no economic prospects otherwise to have goods.

My hobby is statistics. I graduated from college 50 years ago, exactly in 1971, and I've been following the statistics ever since.

■ Is there any hope today for the economy, given that over 66 percent of Moldova's exports go to the EU, after Russia imposed an economic embargo on Chisinau in 2013?

■ All evil was somehow for good. We were lucky that the EU extended a helping hand to us, and Romania in the first place. If this hadn't happened, we would have been in a really bad situation. Russia hit us not only by banning imports from the Republic of Moldova, but also by the price for gas and electricity from the Cuciurgan plant.

Transnistria at the table of the great negotiations

■ What does the 30 years of independence mean for the Transnistrian case? Do you still have any hope that this region beyond the Dniester will de facto join the Republic of Moldova?

■ There are several factors involved in this case, and we cannot give up on this 'lizard tail'. In the worst case, we could participate in an exchange with Ukraine. I think the EU could somehow persuade Ukraine to make some concessions.

However, we cannot give up on this region. There is still great economic and industrial potential there. There is also very good agricultural land with straight plains and much chernozem. I think we need to 'buy' the solution. I don't know though if this should be done with money or otherwise. Maybe if Germany weren't so friendly with the Kremlin, a solution would be easier to find.

The problem is that Russia maintains this region with free gas. And we pay for it. There, across the Dniester, gas is free, while in our case, Gazprom supplies us with gas at one of the highest prices in Europe.

During a recent visit to Chisinau, the deputy head of the Moscow Presidential Administration, Dmitry Kozak, said that the Transnistrian case is an internal matter of the Republic of Moldova. My question is how can there be only the internal matter of the Republic of Moldova, when Russia has thousands of soldiers in Transnistria. The problem is also about the Soviet ammunition stored in Cobasna. In case of an accident, everything will blow up there and shrapnel will reach Bucharest. The key to the settlement is with the big powers.

■ What will you do next in this government?

■ Now it is our last chance. No one will trust us if things don't change in the

next four years. No one will believe in Democracy as there is currently an unimaginable robbery in the country. In 2001, former President Mircea Snegur attacked the electorate, saying the people had made a wrong choice by voting for Voronin. However, that was a protest vote against those who were in power before Voronin.

Now 63 mandates have been given to Maia Sandu whom the people trust. We will not give in in the case of the Prosecutor General and we will go all the way to dismiss him. He can criticize us all, but we have to get rid of him, because he is the main impediment. All the onerous personages from the Republic of Moldova are hiding behind him - socialists and communists, and all the thieves who are now hiding in other countries. That's why he is not giving in.

■ How serious is this phenomenon of emigration from the Republic of Moldova? Why do you think the people left the Republic of Moldova and are there still hopes for them to return?

■ If some positive things start, part of the diaspora will return. Some of them are waiting to be invited for posts. Many Moldovan specialists were brought to several ministries and to the Parliament. It also takes a little patience.

Yes, the phenomenon of migration exists. Five million people also left Romania, and about one million people left the Republic of Moldova. In percentage terms, however, more people left Moldova. From one point of view, this is not the worst thing. People who left are looking differently at things. You have probably seen how organized they were in the presidential and parliamentary elections. They want to change things. But at the same time, I can see they do not venture to invest here, because there is a lack of trust. However, it would be very good if they did. Especially in agriculture.

■ Thank you for the interview!

Editorial

Declaration of Independence: a Testament for a better future

On 27 August 1991, the Parliament of Chisinau adopted the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova. This year marks 30 years since that historic day full of hopes. Unfortunately, for a large part of our society, this will be a holiday with a bitter taste, a holiday overshadowed by disappointments.

The festivities announced by the authorities on this occasion will not be able to blur away our disappointment. It is difficult to enjoy such an important day in our recent history, when a third of the country's population has emigrated in search of a decent life; when the country's economy dominated by monopolies and dark schemes impoverishes Moldovans; when the rule of law is rotten and corrupt; when justice protects the corrupt; when the Russian army is still stationed illegally in the country; when the country is torn apart by separatism; when the constitutional authorities subsidize the separatist regime in Tiraspol; when the Romanian language does not yet have its deserved place in the country's Constitution, etc.

The ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence have been desecrated, traded, ignored or betrayed by most Moldovan governments and generations until now. And a good part of our political class, nostalgic for Soviet times and self-proclaimed statist only after independence became a fact, did everything in its power to discredit and erase the Declaration of Independence from the collective memory of Moldovans.

In order to achieve their infamous goal, the "Leninist-born statesmen" did not hesitate to set fire to the original act of the Declaration of Independence during the April 2009 protests, which ravaged the building of the Chisinau



**Editorial by Victor Chirila,
executive director of the Foreign
Policy Association (APE)**

Parliament. I don't think that was a simple and unfortunate accident. On the contrary, I think it was a premeditated act, a sacrilege. You ask why?

Because through the Declaration of Independence voted on 27 August 1991, Moldovans won two essential rights, inalienable for their future, two rights which were not to the liking of the former Soviet metropolis and its acolytes in Chisinau: 1) To build a sovereign, independent and democratic state; and 2) To decide the present and future of this state without any external interference in accordance with the "sacred ideals and aspirations of the people in the historical and ethnic space of its national becoming."

In essence, these two rights make the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova a true testament left to us and future generations by our parents. The question of the day is, however, whether we are still able to realize these sacred ideals, whether we can still live up to the aspirations of our parents.

On 11 July 2021, we all demonstrated that we are not indifferent to our independence will, that we care about our future and the future of our country. We have mobilized, united and chosen a new political class which is young, incorruptible and, I think, ambitious in line with the ideals of the Declaration of Independence, which is, after all, the key to our future national achievements. This makes me look into the future with optimism and, like many fellow citizens, on August 27, I will celebrate the ideals of the Declaration of Independence clearly inscribed in our collective memory. That is why they will never burn, on the contrary, they will always remain in our hearts and thoughts.

I believed then Moldova will develop very quickly and move at the same pace as the Baltic states

Cornelia Cozonac, director of the Center for Journalistic Investigations of Moldova (CIJM)

The director of the Center for Journalistic Investigations of Moldova (CIJM), Cornelia Cozonac, has shared with us some memories related to 27 August 1991, when the Republic of Moldova declared its independence from the former Soviet Union. A fourth-year student at the journalism faculty, she has continued her vocation as a militant for change and assisted as a journalist in all the transformations produced in the Moldovan society in the last three decades. As a journalist, she dedicated herself to investigative journalism, revealing, together with her team from the CIJM, multiple cases of corruption in almost two decades of operation of the Center that she is leading. We are inviting you to read in the following lines what exactly the last 30 years of the history of the Republic of Moldova have meant for Cornelia Cozonac.

■ You've been in the press since the '90s. How do you see this period of about 30 years since independence from the perspective of the press in the Republic of Moldova -did it develop to democratic standards or not, and if not, what are the main causes?

■ In this period of 30 years since the declaration of independence by the Republic of Moldova, like the whole republic, the press has gone through various transformations. Of course, it has developed and risen to higher standards. In the 1990s there were



only a few newspapers and some of them that were active in the Soviet period have turned into independent newspapers. The independent press has gradually begun to appear in the regions as well. However, investigative journalism did not exist. The investigations were based then on the Soviet model. Basically, Western-style journalism began somewhere closer to the 2000s.

In 2003, we set up the Center for Journalistic Investigations of Moldova (CIJM), which was the first media organization in which journalists did

journalism in the sense of promoting free press and bringing certain standards in the press. The CIJM also came up with the first team of investigative journalists. Since then, we have developed as a team and done a lot of investigations. In the meantime, Moldovan investigative journalists have grown and now we can say that we have some good teams of investigative journalists here.

Somewhere around 2009 televisions began to develop with debates and talk shows that did not really exist until then. It was just the state television and

a few small independent ones. From that date we can also talk about the development of television.

It is true, however, that much of the press has been politically influenced. There have always been media outlets that were actually funded by oligarchs and certain political leaders and parties, and did the politics of those parties. Basically, we can't talk about objective and quality journalism in the case of those TV stations. Unfortunately, the press that supported the political parties was the majority, while the independent press has managed with difficulties during this period of 30 years.

Activism during the student times

■ **What memories do you have of the 27th of August 1991? What was the atmosphere like and how was the detachment from the Soviet Union seen through the eyes of a young journalism student?**

■ I was in the fourth year at the Journalism faculty and the years before the big event were marked by the national liberation movement. We, the students, participated in all the demonstrations, public protests and marches that were organized. I remember a very big protest before the declaration of independence. In front of the Parliament was still the monument of Engels and Marx, with the two of them on the bench. I remember that there were a lot of people trying to force the entrance into Parliament. There were a lot of policemen, but the crowd broke the line and forced the doors, and my colleagues and I found ourselves near the monument. The crowd was pushing and pushing us over it and I remember hitting our feet badly. We were lucky that some policemen understood that the crowd was crushing us and helped us to get up and get out of there. Later, I went to the university

doctor, who was a supporter of the National Liberation Movement. He provided us with the necessary aid and gave us some days off. I don't know what could have happened to us had it not been for the policemen who helped us to get out of the crowd, because there was a lot of noise and no one could hear you even if you screamed.

■ **What have those events meant for the young people then? What did they dream of then and how many of those dreams have come true?**

■ I believed then that Moldova would develop very quickly and move at the same pace as the Baltic states. We hoped that in a few years we would be able to call ourselves Europeans and that we would finally break away from the ex-Soviet space. We also hoped that we would unite with Romania much faster. At that time, the unification movement was much stronger. It was said then that the unification would happen very soon.

But we are seeing today, 30 years later, that the unification is still far way. Many of the ideals of that time didn't come true and the people were disappointed by the leaderships that came to power in the following years and lost much of the momentum of the '90s.

I remember that a lot of people from the regions came to Chisinau by foot to protest. They walked all night to protest in the morning. It was an extraordinary energy - one of freedom, which gave you a lot of hopes for total change, for the reunification of the nation, for the establishment of the Romanian language. We were already trying to write in Latin script in the third year. Until then, we were writing Romanian with Cyrillic script. By the second year of university, several books had appeared in Romanian and in Latin script. But there were very few such books. By the way, I was buying

books in Latin script from different cities in the Soviet Union. There were some shops back then called "Drujba" (friendship) from where we used to buy books in different languages, including Romanian.

I used to practice sports when I was a student and travelled for sports competitions. I even travelled on my own with my colleagues because it was very cheap to travel to the countries of the Soviet Union. We as students could buy tickets at half price and could travel easily. In all those years I collected a lot of books in Latin script that I read both for my faculty and universal history.

■ **In your opinion, why has this transition period been lasting so long? Are you optimistic that this time Republic of Moldova will manage to take that step towards the EU and its development standards?**

■ I've always been an optimist. With each election cycle, we expected and hoped that things would change. Unfortunately, we ended up going through those four years several times and each time without further changes. Now there are more hopes with regard to the new leadership in Chisinau, a stable pro-European majority, and hopefully they will have enough courage to change things once and for all in the Republic of Moldova and then take the path of European integration.

That is why the new power must be firm in this endeavour. Unfortunately, we are in a space strongly influenced by Russia. Even if the Republic of Moldova was not always important for Russia, the latter kept it in its sphere of influence precisely in order to negotiate certain conditions with the West. Or simply to prevent Ukraine from moving forward or to use it as a buffer zone in this region from where it can influence Europe and probably put certain conditions on the United States.

Quite a lot has been invested here. Since Moldova is a small country, Russian investments are not so large compared to those of other countries, but enough to keep it under its influence and try various manipulations with this region to establish certain conditions. This was done through the people who have always been in the service of Russia.

The mirages of illicit enrichment from state property

■ **You have been writing journalistic investigations for over 20 years. You have seen and written about a lot of corruption. Why did the Moldovan leaders fail to reach the position of statespersons and were more kleptomaniacs with small interests?**

■ This is because the level of corruption has always been high. The corruption mechanisms in state institutions work very well without compromising. It is a mechanism that swallows relatively easily people who are trying to change things. If they are different from those involved in corruption schemes, they are swallowed up or thrown out of the system.

This system works very well. Let's hope that now, when there is a strong pro-European majority, this will not work. The people used to quickly fall prey to that system when they were lured with money or other favours. Any power until now, despite coming to power with promises of change and anti-corruption promises, has very quickly lost the fight against corruption. Either they weren't prepared enough or they weren't good enough at what they wanted to do. Eventually, they fell prey to corruption schemes. That is why they have not been able to fight corruption to the end.

■ **Thirty years later, do you think the justice reform and the eradication of corruption will be an easier process**

with the new government or this deeply corrupt system will defend itself with stoicism and fall harder?

■ There are now extremely high real chances of changing the situation, because this new power is made up of people who have not gone through corruption schemes. With absolute power, they can now carry out a real anti-corruption campaign in all structures. If they produce good examples of such things the situation will change.

The population gave this massive vote for one party for the first time. I must admit that I did not believe in the success of this strategy of Maia Sandu and the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS). I was afraid of our voters who are very unpredictable and sometimes can vote like you don't expect. We had the case in 2001, when they brought to power the Communists with 71 seats in Parliament.

Then the situation with the Democratic Party was reversed, after the PLDM came to power with very big promises to fight corruption. Plahotniuc then appeared in the political sphere. In general, it is difficult to anticipate how the average citizen will vote in certain elections. But the fact that now the people have united and voted for a party in order to change the situation, this means the citizens have put their hope in a party to change this state of affairs.

PAS and Maia Sandu have a unique chance to change and make history for the Republic of Moldova in establishing a pro-European course. It will not be easy, because the corruption schemes we have talked about earlier are still working extremely well. They will work and corrupt people will resist. They will seek to come up with new schemes and compromise certain actions of the government and certain people. But if the political leadership comes up with very clear priorities of integrity and

rejects any act of corruption and attempt to compromise, they will be successful. But this time, I think, they will be able to do what they set out to do, because the citizens have invested them with great confidence.

Career out of passion

■ **In 1991 you were very young, if you had known what was to come in the next 30 years, would you have stayed to fight or would you have gone to perhaps better horizons, as many young people are doing today?**

■ I've always liked what I'm doing. I'm doing journalism and I haven't gotten bored since graduation. I like my profession and what I'm doing every day and I think that I would have chosen this path anyway and I would have done journalism. I think I have achieved a lot, but of course I have also expected from things to change because I also want a better future for my child. Now there are prospects to study abroad, but also to return to Moldova and work here.

I have often said that, since 1992, I have been able to do real, independent and honest journalism in a professional way. So it was possible. Maybe we should have been more such journalists in order to change things in the country faster. But I do not regret for a second that I stayed in the Republic of Moldova. I love my country very much and I hope that one day we will be even bigger together with Romania, as we once were. This perspective is closer than ever.

My entire activity was marked by the fact that during my student years I was on the barricades and I have remained active ever since. I am pleased with the fact that I was part of a piece of contemporary history of the Republic of Moldova.

■ **Thank you!**

I didn't have to look for topics for my novels for too long. They were at hand; they were all around me

Iulian Ciocan, writer and journalist



Culture was certainly neglected in the 30 years that have passed since the declaration of Moldova's independence from the USSR. I have discussed with the writer Iulian Ciocan, who can boast 10 novels, many of them translated abroad into several languages of international circulation. He has shared with us the cuisine of contemporary Bessarabian literature and explained the condition of the Moldovan writers and the problems they face. We are inviting you to read the extensive interview with the writer and Free Europe journalist, Iulian Ciocan.

■ Mr. Ciocan, I would like to go back in time and tell us what you remember about the day of 27 August 1991 and the declaration of independence of the Republic of Moldova from the USSR?

■ It's been a few years since then and it's hard for me to remember exactly what happened that day. However, I remember it was a very beautiful day. I was excited that the "evil empire" was collapsing, to paraphrase an American president. I was one of the very active young people, I participated in all kinds of meetings of citizens who wanted the collapse of the Soviet Union. So I

remember living a great joy. The feeling was that a new era was beginning and that from then on, we would live differently. After a while, I realized I was wrong.

■ What was the atmosphere back then and what were the dreams of the young people of that time? What exactly were they hoping for?

■ We were idealistic young people. Many of us were students, we were romantic and idealistic, and we imagined that with the collapse of the Soviet Union everything would go very well. Many of us even imagined the unification with Romania. At that time, I must mention this, the idea of unification with Romania was floating in the air. It seemed pretty likely. For us, the romantic and idealistic young people, the unification seemed a solution in the complicated situation of that time.

Political mistakes

■ Have you addressed this moment in your books? If so, please tell us how you imagined this moment of declaring independence from the USSR?

■ In the novel "The Land of Sasha Kozak", which many call a novel of transition, I'm describing the '90s that followed the proclamation of independence. I have an episode there about the rallies of '88 and '89, which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. And I have there some idealistic

Moldovan characters who wanted the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also some protagonists who see things from the perspective of minorities that somehow opposed the anti-Soviet trend.

I've tried to see the revolution from several perspectives and I think I succeeded. My impression now, after several years, is that many mistakes were made then. Namely, that, in fact, those who came to power were intoxicated by power. Many of them got caught up in political games and did not live up to expectations. More precisely, they did not do what they should have done and many mistakes were made even in relation to minorities, from my point of view.

What happened next with Transnistria, I think, was also because of some mistakes made by the deputies at that time.

■ What did the separation from the USSR mean for the Bessarabian writers? Was it maybe a revival, maybe an impulse to write in Romanian? How was that moment seen? From a cultural point of view and especially for Bessarabian writers, how have these last 30 years been? Have they been prolific or not?

■ In a way, yes, because the following 30 years were very rich in terms of creation, in the sense that they offered you a lot of topics. This post-Soviet reality was offering a lot. A writer had a big choice of what to put into his/her narratives. I didn't have to look for topics for my novels for too long. They were at hand, they were all around me. You picked them up, you ran your fantasy and immediately an exciting narrative came out of it.

On the other hand, they were complicated years, because, while in the beginning writers had an important

role in society and were seen as leaders, later, however, their social role has diminished, and now we are totally overshadowed by bloggers, recent celebrities, influencers. Many of them are quite superficial.

Writers have virtually no role in today's Moldovan society, both the popular ones and less popular. This is the paradox. Therefore, this distinction is no longer valid. No matter if you're a professional writer and you're doing something important, something remarkable, or you're a mediocre writer who writes stupid texts- all of them are in the same pot. That's just how I see it. After all, this thing doesn't stop you very much, if you are a real writer and you know what you want to do and you have projects that you are working hard on.

But the fact that the role of the writer, of an intellectual, is no longer so important seems to me somehow a social failure. I think a writer could say no less interesting things than a politician, a political analyst or even a journalist.

Lack of support and minimal interest

■ Do you think that in the last 30 years politicians have paid enough attention to the development of culture or not? What could they have done better in this regard?

■ Unfortunately, they didn't do much. We have to say this. And I can start from my personal experience. I am a writer and I currently have ten novels translated abroad. Six of them were translated with the support of the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR), an institution in Bucharest that helped me, a Bessarabian writer, to publish novels abroad. The Moldovan state did not help me at all.

I understand that it was a complicated period, that it is difficult in Moldova. But we have somehow been left in the lurch and I don't think the field of culture is the least important. This is a field that should have been better supported. A country stands out abroad not only through wines and I don't know what other achievements we have here, but also through culture. Perhaps other fields of culture have been better supported. I am talking mainly about literature and it seems to me that it has been left to chance.

■ In your opinion, was the Romanian language used or not as a tool in the hybrid wars waged here by Moscow?

■ Probably yes. The simple fact that the Romanian language was not recognized as a state language and during all this time we had in the Constitution this article 13 which said that the state language is the "Moldovan language" could also be a consequence of Moscow's influence. I don't really think that Moscow would like to have the Romanian language in the Moldovan Constitution. On the other hand, the Moldovan politicians were not very consistent in restoring the natural rights to the Romanian language.

■ But we have a decision of the Constitutional Court which says that the Declaration of Independence is a legal act that prevails over the Constitution and the Romanian language is the one that should be enshrined as the state language in the Constitution...

■ Exactly, the Parliament did nothing about it. In the end, the Parliament did not vote in the past to have the name "Romanian language" in the Constitution. I remember the politician Marian Lupu (former speaker of the Parliament) who said that the language we speak is "Romanian", but we can also call it "Moldovan".

So, all politicians somehow avoided addressing this issue because they realized that the moment they say bluntly that we speak Romanian, they will suffer politically and will no longer reap dividends in elections. That was actually the problem.

No regrets

■ **If you had known the transition would take so long in the Republic of Moldova - we are already 30 years away - would you have chosen to stay here or maybe you would have emigrated to other countries, as colleagues or friends of yours have probably done?**

■ It often occurs to me now that I should have probably left. On the other hand, it would have been complicated to leave my parents or friends. In general, it's pretty hard now, at my age, to let myself be dominated by regrets, and I don't even want to.

Yes, when I was young, I had the opportunity to stay in Romania. And maybe it would have been good if I had stayed. But now I can't say anything. I stayed at home, that's the situation. In the end, this was also a decision and maybe not the worst. It was quite complicated to live these 30 years in the Republic of Moldova. It's a not-so-beneficial environment for a writer. As the Russian writer Victor Erofeev said, it offers you lots of topics as a writer, but it is hell for you as a citizen. A suffocating and complicated environment - this has been the Republic of Moldova in these 30 years.

■ **What are your hopes now with this new pro-European government? Will the Republic of Moldova go the European way, as everyone hopes, in a relatively fast time or this transition will continue for several years from now?**

This is a question that many of us are asking ourselves now. It's an important

one and I don't know if we have an answer to it now. The expectations are very high. Many people voted for this pro-European government because they are tired of this swamp of transition and want some real change. People are waiting to see real change.

I don't know yet what will happen. I have some hopes, but I was a little surprised by this decree of Maia Sandu related to the military parade on August 27 here in the center of Chisinau. I don't think we need that and I see no reasons for a military parade now. It was different if PAS, for example, achieved some successes and then a military parade could take place. But now this seems premature and meaningless. If PAS does not keep its promises and does not achieve tangible results - and there have been many promises - I am afraid we will be still wallowing in this mire of corruption and poverty many years from now.

■ **Thank you for the interview!**

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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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