

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

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News in Brief



The Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization developed, on June 28th, an initiative to amend the law through which foreign citizens will be able to work in the Republic of Moldova without a work permit. The Minister of Economic Development and Digitalization, Dumitru Alaiba, claims that the current legislation contains several provisions that limit access to qualified labour and, thus, block the country's economic growth. "When an investor comes to launch a business in Moldova, he does not have to start his journey by applying for a work permit at the Migration and Asylum Office. When a Moldovan company wants to hire expertise from abroad, the work permit does not have to be an impediment. Due to this constraint, investors actually bypass the Republic of Moldova also because they simply do not have anyone to hire", he declared. Thus, in addition to the 18 categories of foreign citizens who can get hired in the Republic of Moldova without a work permit, citizens from the 27 member states of the European Union, but also from 19 other countries such as the USA, Great Britain, Switzerland, Ukraine, Japan, South Korea and others could benefit from this right. The authorities claim that there are many sectors of the economy that need labour.



The Republic of Moldova signed, on June 27, the trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). The agreement will allow Moldovan producers to export goods, without paying customs tariffs, to the four EFTA member countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. The signing of such an agreement strengthens the economic ties between Moldova and Western countries, stimulates international cooperation and sends a clear message to our partners - Moldova respects the principles of fair trade and promotes a transparent and predictable environment for cross-border trade transactions, claims Prime Minister Dorin Recean in a post on his Facebook page. President Maia Sandu claims that this agreement is another important step towards our economic integration in Europe and contributes to maintaining stability and increasing the well-being of citizens.



The Federal Council of Switzerland adopted, on June 28, sanctions targeting five Moldovan citizens. The argument of the decision invokes "attempts to destabilize the Republic of Moldova". Among them are businessmen and politicians who "participated in acts of undermining the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova". Those five are banned from entering and transiting Switzerland, and their assets from this country will be frozen. "Switzerland thus supports the sanctions imposed by the EU at the request of Moldova due to the intensification of destabilizing actions in this country since the beginning of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine," notes the Federal Council. The measures applied by Switzerland provide for the freezing of the assets and economic resources of those persons and the prohibition of entry and transit through Switzerland. Switzerland's decision represents the transposition of an earlier EU decision in this regard. Moreover, Norway also aligned itself with this decision.

The EPC Summit, an administrative test successfully passed by Chisinau on its European path



The European Political Community (EPC) Summit, the event held on June 1st at the Mimi Castel in the village of Bulboaca near Chisinau, placed Chisinau among the great European capitals, where important decisions for the entire Europe were made. The administrative test of organizing an event of such a scale was successfully passed by

the Moldovan authorities. They behaved exemplary in terms of the resources they had at their disposal.

It is true that other partner countries, especially Romania, contributed to this organizational success, but the full credit can only go to the Republic of Moldova, which demonstrated it can rise

to the level of such an event.

The Republic of Moldova obtained not only image benefits from this summit. There was tangible military aid from Poland, which sent a significant shipment of military equipment to Chisinau that will be used by the employees of the Ministry of

► the Interior. Also, the Republic of Moldova obtained substantial financial aid of EUR 50 mln from Norway. It will most likely be used for the advance procurement of important quantities of gas so that the authorities can prepare for the cold season in time.

This would reduce the pressure on the gas supplies this winter. It would also strengthen the resilience and energy security of the Republic of Moldova and diminish the blackmail levers that Russia has not hesitated to use against Moldova in the recent past to influence the course of politics in Chisinau. Internally, the HoReCA industry benefited a lot, because it hosted at this summit several thousand participants from all categories - from heads of state and governments, their delegations, experts and, last but not least, foreign journalists who

covered the event. At the same time, it was for the first time that President Maia Sandu was the host of such a round table attended by the most important statesmen of Europe and its vicinity. On this occasion, the president also announced her intention to run for another presidential term next year.

Also, the most travelled road in the Republic of Moldova - R2 - was rehabilitated in record time and will remain for further use by citizens. The wine and agricultural industry were also well represented at this summit. The authorities organized various events within and on the margin of the meeting to promote Moldovan products, which have already been taking the path of the European Union for several years, in the proportion of about two thirds.

All these benefits and opportunities give confidence to the Republic of Moldova for the continuation of its European path. Along with this summit, a favourable report by the European Commission at the end of October and a positive vote by the European Council in December are also needed. Therefore, the results of the pro-European efforts in Chisinau will be assessed at the end of this year, when the Republic of Moldova is facing a new stage in its history - the opening of negotiations on accession chapters with the EU. In a positive scenario, this will be a long-term process, which will require not only political will but also endurance and continuous effort.

Madalin Necsutu

Moldova demonstrated administrative capacity at the EPC Summit, which indicates that it also has administrative capacity for EU accession

With Olga Rosca, presidential advisor on foreign affairs and communication, we discussed in this interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter about the benefits for Moldova and its image after hosting the most important event of such scale its history - the European Political Community Summit, which took place on June 1st at the Mimi Castel. We have discussed the image benefits for Chisinau, but also the tangible ones related to military aid, funds, and plans to secure the energy and justice sectors. We invite you to read the interview below.



■ **The EPC Summit was perceived as a success of the Republic of Moldova. What are the country's political and economic benefits following this historic event?**

■ First of all, Moldova was seen by our citizens and foreigners alike as a state that has many friends, which is not alone even in the conditions of a war on our borders and a hybrid war waged by Russia against us.

We are treated by all European countries as equals and all those leaders have come to see that we are European. That was one of the biggest benefits.

As for the economic benefits, they discussed economic aspects in the bilateral or trilateral meetings held by President Maia Sandu or Prime Minister Dorin Recean. Messages were sent that Moldova wants to economically integrate into the European transport system, and the signing of the Trade Agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) that took place today [June 27th] shows that this intense cooperation with the European countries brings concrete benefits.

This free trade agreement will allow Moldovan manufacturers to more easily export their products to these countries - Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland - where there is great potential for growth.

■ **At the same time, the Republic of Moldova also enjoyed unprecedented visibility. How would this success also translate diplomatically, since we know that Moldova is in the process of convincing all EU countries for a positive vote in December at the European Council?**

■ A very simple example is one of the recommendations of the European Commission, namely that we need to strengthen the administrative capacity to deliver reforms. From this point of view alone, it was very clear that our institutions can cooperate, benefit from external support and deliver an event of such a scale.

Regarding this, the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, said very clearly that the Republic of Moldova demonstrated administrative capacity at the EPC Summit, which indicates that we have the administrative capacity for EU accession.

This was just one example of these diplomatic benefits. Many of the present leaders at the Summit were in Moldova for the first time, so this communication with them is very important. When you have a country, which you have to convince to allow you to enter this club of 27 states and the European family, which does not know you at all, it is normal for it to have certain question marks.

For us, the fact that everyone came to the Republic of Moldova and saw that we are a European country, that we speak a European language, and have a European system, will facilitate this process of convincing European countries. This is in addition to the fact that we need to do our homework and fulfil those recommendations in order to move forward with the reform agenda.

Consolidated image

■ **How was this event reflected in the international media and what was the impact of the 600**

foreign journalists covering this EPC Summit?

■ Moldova was seen as a state that contributes to the stability and security of Europe. By hosting a summit that brought together almost all European leaders and all the institutions of the European Union, we showed that we are not just beneficiaries of assistance, but want to contribute more and more to the discussions on the issues affecting all citizens of the continent.

We were seen as a state that contributes and delivers security. The fact that all the leaders came just 20 kilometres from the border with Ukraine, where Russia is waging a brutal war, and we, together with our partners, managed to ensure the security of the event, meant that Moldova is also a security provider.

We are working hard, with the support of our partners, to grow this role as a security provider to benefit the entire region. Let's be a strong neighbour for Ukraine and a strong partner for the European Union for the benefit of everyone, taking into account the threats in the region.

■ **The Republic of Moldova announced shortly before and during the Summit about various military aid from Poland to strengthen the defence capabilities. Is this also an additional benefit obtained by Moldova from its partners after the EPC summit?**

■ The EPC Summit was an important security exercise. It was the first time that all security institutions worked together with external partners and colleagues from counterpart institutions in other states. They learned

a lot and in some cases they also benefited from concrete donations.

Thus, we had to learn, to benefit, resulting in consolidated administrative capacities thanks to this summit.

Energy security assistance

■ **In terms of energy and energy security after this Summit, can we say that Moldova will be better off in the future in terms of gas purchases and interconnection with other states in the region, as a result of discussions that Chisinau may have had with countries that could help Moldova in this regard?**

■ Energy security is indeed a priority that is discussed at all bilateral meetings, conferences or summits attended by our officials. The same situation was at the EPC Summit, also because both topics – energy and interconnectivity – were discussed. We would like to be more connected to the EU.

■ On the gas side, we are doing well, because the Iasi - Chisinau gas pipeline is operational and last winter showed us how important this pipeline was. This winter has also shown us that we need to develop interconnectivity on the electricity side. The Vulcanești-Chisinau power line is already being built, while the Balti-Suceava line is at the concept level, waiting for confirmation of financing, and will take longer, but it is very important to build it so as to reduce or diversify the sources of electricity supply.

At the same time, we also discuss with partners about green energy and renewables. We want to

learn from them how to create conditions for investors from their countries to come and invest in our renewables.

■ **We know that Norway granted Moldova Euro 50 mln aid at the EPC Summit. How will this materialize – in money or gas from this country, which we know is one of the biggest European gas producers?**

■ We have this grant commitment from Norway, but we are still discussing how to use it.

Justice reform, a top priority

■ **Was the justice sector reform also discussed at the Summit? We know that six of the nine recommendations of the EU for the Republic of Moldova deal with the justice sector. Where do we stand on this chapter in the context in which the European Commission is preparing a report on the reform progress in the Republic of Moldova for the month of October?**

■ Reforms are always on the agenda of our discussions. We report progress, but it is obvious that the justice reform is the most complicated. It lasts, because we don't look for shortcuts.

Justice reform must be qualitative and sustainable. We also see resistance from within the judicial system and it's not easy, but everyone is committed to moving forward and that's what we're doing, including through requests for help from partners.

■ **Just a few days ago, it was one year since the historic moment when the Republic of Moldova received the candidate country**

status for EU accession. If we were to make a short assessment of the achievements in the past year, what are the areas in which Moldova made the most significant progress?

■ The European Commission has already expressed its opinion on that, mentioning that three of the nine recommendations have been fully met. Those recommendations relate to the involvement of civil society in the decision-making process, the protection of human rights, and the complete remedy of the legislative deficiencies identified by the Venice Commission.

Together with the partner states, we have made great progress in terms of “de-oligarchisation”. All those international sanctions on the Moldovan oligarchs, for which we did a lot of diligence and advocacy in order to limit the influence of the Moldovan oligarchs, have worked. Those include the sanctions imposed on those who continue to lead actions to destabilize the country. In principle, we have made progress on each requirement in the justice sector.

For example, when it comes to the “de-oligarchization”, in March alone, the authorities froze assets illegally acquired by oligarchs worth Euro 55.7 mln.

Another positive step was that the legislation regarding trials in absentia against alleged criminals who fled the country came into force, and Ilan Shor could be sentenced in absentia. This is an example that we passed this legislation, which is now working and being implemented.

■ **Thank you!**

Is the EPC Summit a point of no return for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova?

June 2023 could be the no return point in the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova. A point where geopolitics, regional security, international public opinion, but also internal developments in the Republic of Moldova have generated a situation that makes it impossible, at least in the foreseeable short and medium term, a historical setback and a return of the Republic of Moldova to Russia's sphere of direct influence.

The European Political Community Summit, the most important and prestigious event hosted by the Republic of Moldova since independence, brought together 48 heads of state and government and European officials to Chisinau, and "exported" to Europe many positive news about Moldova.

The very decision to organize this event in Chisinau was a very strong gesture of support from Europe not only for the Republic of Moldova, but also for Ukraine, torn apart for the second year by the Russian aggression. The decision to gather all of Europe's leaders less than 20 kilometres from the Ukrainian airspace which is violated every day by Russian missiles and bombers, was a clear political signal of European solidarity for Kiev and Chisinau and a sign that the "iron curtain" will never fall on the Prut again.

For Chisinau, in addition to the immense image capital, the summit brought good news in the field of energy, infrastructure, and defence, but also extremely valuable



promises in relation to the European perspective. The President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, urged the European leaders to support the idea that the Republic of Moldova should start the negotiations regarding the accession to the European Union already this year. "The fact that we have met here today is not only a signal of support, but also of commitment on our part for the status of a candidate state for accession. The European Parliament should start negotiations this year. We are impressed by the speed with which the Republic of Moldova responded to all the recommendations formulated by the EU and how it is advancing in its activity. We will be ready when Moldova is ready. Moldova's place is in the European Union", said Roberta Metsola at the end of the summit.

Transnistria is not an impediment to European integration

Another very important signal for Chisinau was given by Josep Borrell, the head of European diplomacy: Transnistria is no longer an insurmountable impediment in the European integration process of the Republic of Moldova. "I think that the European will of this people and this government is obvious, Moldova is a candidate state, something that some months ago looked impossible. Now, they have to work to make the reforms and the way is clear. Moldova's accession is independent of what happens in Transnistria. Cyprus became a member of the European Union having a territorial problem. Moldova can do it." said Josep Borrell.

“The Republic of Moldova is in the heart of Europe. The Republic of Moldova is Europe”, also said Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission.

“Moldova is perceived as a future member of the European Union”, declared the host of the event, president Maia Sandu.

The European Commission will present the final report on the progress of the Republic of Moldova in October, but the decision to open accession negotiations, which will be discussed in December, is a political one and requires the unanimity of the 27 heads of state and government of the European Union. And here, the sympathies of European officials will matter a lot, which will translate into important decisions. Considering the positive signals coming from the EU, it seems that the European officials are willing to give Chisinau another credit of confidence and, despite the significant backlogs in the field of justice, to give the green light to the accession negotiations of the Republic of Moldova to the EU in December. Deficiencies in the field of justice, deoligarization, the rule of law, and the strengthening of administrative capacities will continue to remain on the priorities’ list of the reform processes, with even closer monitoring by the EU.

Sanctioning oligarchs

Also during this period, a few days before the EPC Summit, the EU adopted another important decision for democracy in the Republic of Moldova - for the first time, sanctions were imposed on oligarchs who not only abused the weaknesses of the Moldovan state for theft and drug trafficking influence, but also altered the democratic system and massively

corrupted the poorest categories of the population in order to manipulate them in protests and elections. Internally, the effort to eliminate the influence of organized crime on politics materialized through the ruling of the Constitutional Court to outlaw the party led by the criminal Ilan Șor, with the abolition of all its structures. Thus, the external blocking of the obscure financial circuits of some compromised Moldovan oligarchs, together with the closing of access to politics of the party financed by one of the authors of the theft of the billion, are measures likely to heal the political landscape in the Republic of Moldova, including in the perspective of the elections in the next two years - local, presidential, parliamentary. However, it is vital that the effort to heal the political environment and society in general is also supported by a functional justice system, by anti-corruption investigations and court rulings on large-scale corruption cases, abuse, and undue influence.

In June there were also several regional developments that will have an indirect, but decisive impact on the future of the Republic of Moldova. The first is the counteroffensive launched by Ukraine on June 4th, with the technical support of the West. I think that we are only now at a point where (almost certainly) we no longer risk seeing Russian troops on the streets of Chisinau. And Yevgeny Prigozhin’s armed rebellion, the confusion it brought to Russia and the ridiculous and impotent way in which the crisis was handled by the Russian authorities once again demonstrated the weakness of the Kremlin. And it was further proof for the West that countries that want to free themselves from the medieval influences of Russia and want to be part of the civilized world must be supported in this effort. A victory for Ukraine and the defeat of Russia in this war are fundamental for the future of the Republic of

Moldova and the region, but also for Europe in general. And the upcoming NATO summit in Vilnius in July could come with new security solutions for Ukraine, solutions that the Republic of Moldova must also pay attention to.

Decisive period for the European future

In conclusion, we can say that the period we are going through is a decisive one for the consolidation of the irreversible character of the European course of the Republic of Moldova. It is a process that has been catalyzed by geopolitics and dramatic developments in the region. However, the commitment and effort of the Moldovan authorities are also undeniable. Even though Moldova starts the EU accession negotiations, the risks will not disappear - risks related to regional security, obscure interests in internal politics, the inconsistency of some important reforms, but also the dangers related to Russian hybrid tactics, including those related to disinformation, the use of the anti-EU segment of society, as well as the potential for manipulation through Gagauzia and Transnistria.

For years, if not decades, we have wondered whether the European path of the Republic of Moldova is irreversible or not, and the answer was always that the risks of a setback are even higher than the determination of the political class and the force of society to go down this path. Now, for the first time in our recent history, we can affirm (almost) with certainty that the Republic of Moldova will be in the next decades on the civilized side of history, on the good side of the “new iron curtain” that will keep it away from Russia’s militaristic ambitions.

Lina Grâu

SECURITY & DEFENCE DIGEST



Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives

Security benefits for Moldova as a result of the 2023 EPC Summit

In a broader perspective, the determination of European leaders to meet in the Republic of Moldova, especially in the current geopolitical context, has a strong political significance. For Russia, this represents a direct message of the civilized world of disagreement with its revanchist policy. In addition to the fact that the EPC has a more extensive content than the presence of the EU member countries, the event also confirms a paradigm shift in the EU's relations with its eastern partners, especially the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. From a pragmatic agenda usually incorporating Russia's interests, the EU moved to a confrontational approach, focused on the interests of Moldova and Ukraine, thus looking at the partnership with these two countries from the perspective of securitization. The granting of the EU candidate status, together with the significant increase in assistance to the security and energy sectors, is a confirmation of the change in approach. Another thing is that the EU officials no longer perceive the frozen conflict in the Transnistrian region as an impediment to the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the EU. Though Russia's aggressive policy is what, to a large extent, determined this change of approach, the EU's option to focus on securitization (or the integration of the Eastern partners mentioned through securitization) confirms the awareness of the common benefits of this strategy.

Strengthening the air defence capability

It should be noted that the very process of preparation for the EPC Summit presented a high-level security exercise within a complex event. The fact that the Moldovan airspace was protected by NATO is an extremely important event, although insufficiently publicized. Also, the good organization of the EPC Summit in Moldova was also ensured with the contribution of the Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs (87 employees of the Romanian ministry were delegated to provide support to the national authorities). The forces and means from Romania include provision of medical aid, chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear protection,

emergency medical evacuation, and decontamination modules. Also four advanced medical points and two SMURD helicopters were prepared, if necessary, to perform aero-medical missions. In fact, Romania's support comes in the context of the implementation of the collaboration agreement on the management of Moldovan-Romanian emergency situations starting in 2014.

At the same time, we cannot neglect Poland's support in ensuring the security of the Summit process, whose assistance aimed at both ensuring the continuity of combating the aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, as well as its hybrid attacks on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Thus, Poland's support comprised

of six military planes loaded with weapons and ammunition, the military equipment having been donated to the General Police Inspectorate. The donation batches fall within the national police's equipment standards and are intended to maintain at an appropriate level the training capacity of police officers in the conduct of regular tactical exercises. In fact, Poland supports the acceleration of the accession process of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union and appreciates the country's effort to resist hybrid attacks. It cannot be neglected that this state has an important role in organizing arms deliveries, but also in coordinating various discussions at the European level regarding Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Previously, in the autumn of 2020, rescuers from the Republic of Moldova benefited from a batch of equipment necessary for interventions in risk situations and other equipment necessary for rescue missions.

Getting back to the issue of air defence capability, its lack has been fully felt by the citizens of our state since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Several cases of violation of the national air and land space by Russian missiles, in an attempt to bypass or take by surprise the Ukrainian air defence capability, forced the Republic of Moldova to ask (unsuccessfully) for clarifications from Moscow. Although

there is no clear evidence that these actions directly targeted the Moldovan territory, the event *per se* highlighted existing vulnerabilities on the one hand, and on the other, attempted to shape the domestic informational space, especially trying to temper/delay the efforts of reacting and condemning Moscow's bellicose behaviour.

Given that the summit did not remove the air defense issue from the agenda, demonstrated the EU's commitment and Western support towards the Republic of Moldova. The successful exercise of the temporary protection of Moldovan airspace during the summit could be so "painful" for Moscow that its propaganda apparatus has decided to avoid addressing the subject, at least to a lesser extent than it usually does. The Kremlin's silence could be explained by the fear of forcing the West to assume full and permanent responsibility for the protection of Moldovan airspace. Until now, the absence of geographical access to the Republic of Moldova has allowed Moscow to exploit this vulnerability to constrain/limit Chisinau's political will. In other words, the Russians were silent because the West could deprive them of an extremely important lever for exercising influence over the Republic of Moldova.

Although the temporary defence of the airspace might have been rather symbolic than of practical importance, it gives the Moldovan political class the necessary confidence to continue the European integration efforts. At the same time, it is important that this trust be perceived and exploited correctly. This requires the political class to be aware of and take responsibility for their commitment, before prematurely celebrating success. A clear vision is needed to explore the Western opening that will allow the acceleration of

reforms, especially in the field of security and defence. At the same time, it is important to realize that in addition to airspace protection, simultaneous efforts must be focused on strengthening the capacity of conventional military forces and increasing national resilience to hybrid threats. Initiating a complex approach to the security sector demonstrates, in addition to political maturity and strategic vision, the intention to avoid waste of resources and duplication of efforts and resources, this argument especially being valid in relation to foreign assistance.

At the same time, Chisinau should realize that the European support alone is not enough to overcome the situation. Initiative and perseverance on the part of the authorities are expected now more than ever. Regarding the national defence capacity, the Moldovan authorities should come up with a very well-articulated domestic vision. The development of national air defence capability should take into account, among technical and financial aspects, time constraints. While the apparent Western generosity provides a sense of comfort, alternatives that ensure the achievement of the ultimate goal - the protection of airspace - should not be excluded from the set of options. In other words, if the security situation requires it, combatting this vulnerability should not be limited to the development of the own air defence capacity, in which the management responsibility rests exclusively with the national authorities. Different configurations of partnerships at the bilateral and multilateral level could constitute alternative options in order to partially or fully address the problem.

The 2023 EPC Summit created the primary conditions for such partnerships should the government in Chisinau decide to explore this

opportunity. The discussions about Western assistance to Ukraine, in this case regarding possible alliances on F-16 aircraft capabilities and Patriot missile systems, should not leave the Moldovan government indifferent. The Republic of Moldova should maintain its visibility and presence in different formats of the security dialogue, this offering the possibility of identifying solutions and the right place in the configuration of possible security mechanisms. The approach that Moldova is defended by Ukraine will no longer be an argument, creating, over time, the perception of a lack of responsibility.

Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) - EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM)

The Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union (CSDP) aims at initiatives in the field of defence, domestic and foreign policies, constituting a part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU. The CSDP cooperation framework between the EU and the Republic of Moldova is carried out on three levels: crisis management (Transnistrian conflict regulation and Moldova's participation in international missions and operations under the auspices of the EU), civil security (justice reform, police reform, arms control and the fight against terrorism) and military security (at least until the 2014 events in Ukraine, the cooperation was almost inexistent given the fact that in this field NATO is the key institution of cooperation with the Republic of Moldova).

Based on the above, we can see a division of responsibilities between the EU and NATO related to the security sector of the Republic of Moldova, the first (through CSDP) focusing on law enforcement and

stability, while the second aims to develop the defence sector - the military system. In light of the paradigm mentioned above, the EU could accept the redirection of several sources, from the first two assistance baskets to the last – the military one. This is particularly important now, when the situation requires the revitalization of the national defence system, the core of which is the National Army. The current constraints that the funds from the European Instrument for Peace can only be used for non-lethal military systems could be temporarily revised. Also, the EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM), as part of the CSDP efforts, would promote a more “robust” approach and focus, in addition to the areas of “crisis management, international operations, and law and order”, on counselling in the field of strengthening the national defence capacity.

Starting from the idea that the defence system of the Republic of Moldova is underdeveloped compared to other components of the national security system, the EU’s priority would be to reduce the development discrepancy between the components of the security system and, implicitly, ensure balance within the national security ecosystem. The design of the EU efforts through the EUPM should focus on developing tangible capabilities that will be able, in addition to domestic tasks, to contribute to wider CSDP efforts, including increasing participation

in the EU stabilization missions in different theatres. Compared to Ukraine and Georgia, Moldova’s contribution to the CSDP is by far the most modest. With only eight experts seconded to EUTM Mali and EUTM RCA, Moldova’s approach juggled between the restrictions of neutrality status and a lack of resources. While the latter argument can be somewhat accepted, invoking the status of neutrality in the current security context creates ambiguity. The fact that, on the one hand, Moldova pleads for military support, and on the other, invokes neutrality status within partnerships, generates confusion, and over time this approach could be penalised by the strategic partners.

In the case of participation in CSDP missions, until now, the modest contribution of the Republic of Moldova has had rather a political significance. However, this is unlikely to last indefinitely, and sooner or later, Moldova will have to justify the EU investments. It is therefore imperative that the current EUPM directs its efforts to supplement the assistance of NATO and strategic partners in building professional military forces that, in addition to domestic tasks, could fill the contribution gap in the CSDP efforts.

Although the 2023 EPC Summit sends a discouraging message to Russia, it does not ensure the immunity of the Republic of Moldova in the face of a wide spectrum of threats, especially non-conventional ones. On the contrary, the sense of loss of control

forces Russia to pull its last aces up its sleeve. Therefore, geographical inaccessibility will force Moscow to increase its influence over its puppets in Moldova - especially those in the Transnistrian region and Gagauzia - as an alternative option to the originally planned military invasion. This is also complicating the task of the West (especially the EU), which must design assistance for Moldova in such a way that it resists not only conventional but also hybrid threats. The Russian hybrid tactic rather than the direct military threat that some feared last year, is the main security challenge for Moldova, especially given some of Russia’s military setbacks and heavy personnel losses in Ukraine. Moscow is fully capable of causing difficulties in Moldova without waging a kinetic war. While the massive pro-EU rally in Chisinau on May 21st strikingly illustrated popular support for the EU membership, the recent polls still indicate that the majority of Moldovans who favor joining the European Union face strong opposition from a third of the population. The anti-EU segment of society will continue to provide a useful springboard for Russia’s destabilization efforts. In this context, it is essential to anticipate possible future Russian influence operations in the country, especially before the potentially crucial elections for the country’s development. Based on the above, we conclude that the temporary enthusiasm after the 2023 EPC Summit will disappear before the Republic of Moldova remains face to face with the committed reform agenda.

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