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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

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News in Brief



The Government of the Republic of Moldova decided, on Wednesday, July 26, to reduce the number of diplomatic personnel of the Russian Embassy in Chisinau, as a result of hostile actions against the Republic of Moldova by Russia. The number of Russian diplomats in Chisinau was significantly reduced, thus Chisinau sent home 18 Russian diplomats and 27 technical staff of the Embassy. They have to leave the territory of the Republic of Moldova until August 15. Previously, Russia had 87 people in Chisinau, of which 52 were accredited diplomats and 35 people were technical staff. After this decision, only 10 diplomats and 15 technical staff will remain in Chisinau, which means a three-fold reduction of the Russian diplomatic staff in Chisinau. Instead, Moldova still has only six diplomats in Moscow, while before the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Chisinau had 15 diplomats in the capital of the Russian Federation. The expulsions of Russian diplomats come in the context of the publication of a journalistic investigation which concluded that Russia uses an excessive number of antennas on its diplomatic buildings for espionage actions.



The President of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, Igor Grosu, and Bogdan Aureescu, the adviser on foreign policy of the President of Romania, had a meeting on Tuesday, July 25, in which they discussed security in the region. The Moldovan speaker of Parliament emphasized that Romania is a reliable partner in this context as well. "Through the Support Platform for Moldova, an initiative of launched by Romania, Germany and France, our country benefitted from support to get through this winter, manage the flow of refugees efficiently and, last but not least, ensure peace in the country and focus on the European agenda", declared Igor Grosu. During the meeting, Igor Grosu appreciated the effort made by Romania to open negotiations with the European Union. The Moldovan speaker mentioned the importance of Romania's initiative to establish, at the European level, a separate regime of sanctions against people who try to destabilize the situation in the Republic of Moldova.



The Government approved, on Wednesday, April 26, the denunciation of the agreements of the Council of Heads of Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States regarding the Armed Forces and the Border Guard Troops and, respectively, regarding the Strategic Armed Forces. The Agreement on the Armed Forces and Border Guard Troops provides for the resolution of defence and security issues, including border guarding of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The agreement on the Strategic Armed Forces provides for the resolution of issues related to the management of the Strategic Armed Forces and sole control over nuclear weapons. The Ministry of Defence specifies that the documents that were concluded in Minsk on December 30, 1991, have not been implemented by the Republic of Moldova until now. The spokesperson of the Government, Daniel Vodă, stated that if an agreement is not useful, it is denounced. According to him, all denunciations of agreements within the CIS take into account the interests of the Moldovan citizens.

NATO leaves open a window of opportunity: will the Republic of Moldova use it or not?



The relationship between the Republic of Moldova and NATO experienced a revival caused, mainly, by the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, but also by the increasing awareness of the government in Chisinau that this select club of developed European countries, in their vast

majority, do not dissociate the EU accession from the NATO one. On the contrary, NATO accession is often regarded in practice as a precursor to EU accession.

The reasoning is simple: ensuring a very clear security climate where foreign investors can

secure the capital with which they enter a new market. The authorities in Chisinau quickly understood that no one would come to invest in a country with shaky security, a weak rule of law, and law enforcement and justice institutions that act either insufficiently or

► biasedly. That is why it is important for the Republic of Moldova to consider the two accessions as a package. Without fearing that Russia might intervene.

Currently, in one way or another, Russia is waging an aggressive hybrid war against the Republic of Moldova, and only the resistance of the Ukrainians in Odessa prevents this hybrid aggression from turning into a military one. That is why the Moldovan politicians should themselves become the “trend-setters” of Moldova’s path in NATO and not necessarily wait for the percentage of about 30 percent of those who see the Republic of Moldova in NATO to rise above 50 percent.

The North Atlantic Alliance is the preferred target of Russian propaganda

that demonizes it most often, a fact that will not increase this percentage without a political commitment from Chisinau in this regard. On the other hand, NATO has left open a window of unique opportunity that will not be endless. The reforms were never easy or had the quasi-total support from the citizens. However, they were the beneficiaries of the changes for the better.

That’s why the politicians from the Republic of Moldova should get out of their comfort zone and talk openly about what they want in the relationship with the EU, NATO, and Russia. Chisinau should fully assume its adherence to a complete civilizational space and abandon the policy of half measures or the timidity of political approaches in order not to disturb Moscow. In one word, to assume a precise and very clear

foreign policy course, based on its own interest and sovereign decisions.

It takes a courageous political commitment to break stereotypes. NATO does not dissociate from the EU or vice versa. On the contrary, they go hand in hand. And the recent examples of Sweden and Finland applying for membership after hundreds of years of neutrality show that pragmatism must give way to conservatism and isolationism. When the authorities in Chisinau understand that they must act in the sense of getting closer to NATO, an alliance that gave several political signs of support at the recent summit in Vilnius for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova, the Western support and all the related benefits will accelerate. All for the benefit of the Moldovan citizens.

Moldova is in the “driver’s seat” in the relationship with NATO and we are ready to help in any way it would like us to

The Deputy Assistant to Secretary General of NATO, Burcu San, recently gave an interview to TVR Moldova, before the NATO summit in Vilnius, in which the representative of the North Atlantic Alliance explained in more details about the future of the relationship of the Republic of Moldova with NATO, which the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter took over. She talked about the support Chisinau could benefit from NATO and about the Alliance’s vision of the security of the region in the context of the Russian military invasion in Ukraine. We invite you to read the interview below:

■ The NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoana has recently



stated that the Republic of Moldova can have any type of relationship with NATO it wants. How do you assess the relationship of Moldova with NATO today?

■ Moldova is a long-term partner of NATO and we have had prosperous relations for some time. Practical cooperation is increasing and political dialogue is also deepening. You mentioned Deputy Secretary General Geoana, who recently met with several ministers from your country.

Also, NATO Secretary General [Jens Stoltenberg] met with your President, Maia Sandu, at the Munich Security Conference on 18 February 2023). We are waiting for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicu Popescu, to join the NATO summit in Vilnius on July 11-12.

Clearly, we are having an intensive political dialogue and consultation. We exchange views and want to better understand the security interests of the Republic of Moldova, and practical cooperation is also strengthening. We have several projects and initiatives, for example, on defense and cyber security, civilian training, good governance, training, and logistics. So, it is a prosperous relationship, and Moldova is in the “driver’s seat” within it. You quoted the Deputy Secretary General, Mircea Geoana, saying that Moldova can have any relationship it wants with NATO.

So, we clearly want to have Moldova as the owner of this relationship and we can go as far as Moldova would like.

■ **What are the prospects for the development of this relationship, considering that the Republic of Moldova has the principle of military neutrality written in the Constitution? We know that, in general, the neutral countries of**

Europe, which are not part of NATO, invest heavily in the defence sector.

■ The constitutional neutrality of the Republic of Moldova is an element that we fully respect. We fully support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova.

Neutrality and cooperation are not mutually exclusive. As you know, we also have neutral partners, for example, Austria or Switzerland, with whom we cooperate quite closely. So this is not a zero-sum game, and neutrality is fully compatible with cooperation with NATO. Increased cooperation with NATO or, as I said, political and practical dialogue.

Neutral states or any state have a unique security situation to respond to. And that security situation can evolve over time.

Moldova recently decided to join the European Union. It now has the status of a candidate country. We, EU members and NATO allies, support Moldova in this regard. For example, at NATO, we have a good governance programme that can also support Moldova’s future in the European Union.

This is the cooperation within the limits that Moldova will want to impose regarding its neutrality. We fully respect this.

■ **How do you assess the participation of Moldovan soldiers in Lebanon, which started last year?**

Regarding this participation, we as NATO are not engaged, but clearly any international participation determines Moldova’s role as a security provider, and this is highly appreciated globally.

■ **And how do you assess the joint exercises with NATO member states**

in which Moldova participates? There have also been some problems in the past when Moldovan soldiers were not allowed to participate in international training and joint military exercises. How important is it for a soldier to always stay ready to carry out his mission?

■ Absolutely, the participation of Moldovan soldiers, along with NATO partner countries, is very useful. Of course, the Republic of Moldova has to assess it, but from our perspective, the more Moldova can participate in these exercises, the better the NATO standards, doctrines, training principles and training are assimilated.

And this can only enrich the soldiers’ experience, contribute to the interoperability between different armies and make Moldova’s contribution, like K-FOR or Lebanon, more effective.

■ **How important is it for a soldier to be trained in such back-to-back military exercises to maintain his readiness in the event of a negative (war) scenario?**

■ It is essential that allied soldiers maintain a posture of defense and deterrence. As you mentioned, this is a very important component of training. Any soldier must know what to expect and what to do in such circumstances. They practice different combat scenarios and this only adds to their training as soldiers.

■ **This year, Moldova began to make major investments in the defence area due to the war in its vicinity. This year alone, the defence budget has increased by about 70 percent. How do you assess this and Chisinau’s efforts in strengthening the defence sector?**

■ It is true that many European countries, including Moldova, have

not invested much in defense for several years now. Within the Alliance, we have reversed this trend since 2014. Many Allies are increasingly investing in deterrence and defense. This, of course, strengthens our capabilities within NATO.

And from this perspective, the Republic of Moldova made its own assessment and decided to invest and spend more on defense. This is beneficial for the deterrence and defense capacity of the Republic of Moldova, for security interests, and political independence.

We in NATO, within our long-standing partnership with Moldova, are ready to help it spend more efficiently and wisely, so that we can always exchange views in this regard.

■ What kind of military equipment do you consider suitable for investments in Moldova? What should Moldova buy to make a better army?

■ This is the competence of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Moldova. I know that there is also the National Security Strategy being developed by several institutions in the Republic of Moldova under the guidance of the Presidency.

So, I think this strategy will also guide various policies of various ministries, including the Ministry of Defence. From there, with a threat assessment it makes, Moldova will be able to decide in which military equipment it will invest.

■ How could NATO contribute to these reforms of the defence sector in the Republic of Moldova if the authorities in Chisinau ask for such expertise from NATO?

■ We have expertise in deterrence and defense issues. When the

Moldovan authorities request assistance or advice, we can contact our allies or experts at NATO headquarters.

We can provide advice, support, and training. From NATO, we can also provide a range of non-lethal equipment. And allies can provide equipment or training as part of bilateral cooperation programmes.

In addition, there is the European Union and the European peace funds. They can also be used to finance purchases by the Republic of Moldova.

■ Speaking of allies, Germany recently donated dozens of armored vehicles to Moldova. Can we expect similar help from other NATO members in the near future for Moldova?

■ Moldova is invited to use NATO as a forum for contacting NATO allies. Of course, all 31 of our allies and guests, such as Sweden, meet regularly at NATO headquarters. Sometimes Moldova comes and joins the committee meetings, makes presentations, and presents its needs. This is a good platform to raise awareness among allies, and they of course step in to help Moldova as needed.

■ Moldova has openly requested the support of its Western partners, including NATO member states, to have an air defence system in the context of several Russian missiles flying over Moldova's airspace en route to targets in Ukraine. How necessary is such help for Moldova?

■ Especially with the war in Ukraine, air defence and airspace surveillance are vital. Unfortunately, the Republic of Moldova is very close to this theatre of war, as you described it.

I would say that the decision of the Republic of Moldova to invest in air defence is wise. I know that a surveillance radar will be purchased by the European Peace Facility (EU financial instrument). We also have some non-lethal equipment that can be used in this regard for some projects that are underway.

NATO also helped with aerial surveillance by deploying our early warning control aircraft during the European Political Community (EPC) Summit held here near Chisinau on 1 June.

I believe that together with the EU and NATO allies and partners we can help the Republic of Moldova in its attempt to increase its air defence.

■ How do you assess the relations between NATO and Russia today? They don't look good from the outside, but since you are a NATO official, please tell us more about this aspect.

■ It was Russia that started this brutal war in Ukraine. This was completely uncalled for and is completely illegitimate in all its forms, and we condemn Russia's military actions.

Ukraine is fighting admirably for its right to self-defence. This is also enshrined in the UN Charter, so Ukraine is exercising its right to self-defence.

NATO is very supportive of Ukraine and we will support Ukraine as long as Russian aggression lasts. Allies provide many weapons and systems, equipment and the training that goes with it to Ukraine.

We at NATO run a broad initiative to provide non-lethal military assistance - from food and rations to soldiers, medical kits, ambulances

and bridges. So we are fully committed to supporting Ukraine so that it can prevail in this armed conflict.

This is a war that Russia started and that must end favourably for Ukraine.

With that in mind, we realize that Russia made two big strategic mistakes: one was to underestimate the Ukrainian will to fight - the resilience of the Ukrainians - and the other was to underestimate the cohesion within NATO.

Overall, Western unity has helped Ukraine achieve various successes so far. And that is why we believe that, however long it takes, we will stay with Ukraine.

■ Russia wanted to divide Europe and NATO members and achieved exactly the opposite effect. The EU appears more consolidated and NATO members are closer than ever. How do you see this situation?

■ This is very true. For example, we now have Sweden and Finland joining NATO. In the case of Sweden, we are talking about a 200-year tradition of military neutrality, and Putin's strategic mistake made them rethink their policies in this regard.

Now these countries become NATO members. Both have applied for NATO membership, and Finland is already a member. This is another demonstration of how wrong Putin has been.

We are stronger together and the European Union and NATO are as united as ever to overcome this Russian attack and aggression.

■ Do you still have communication channels open with Russia at NATO for any discussions?

■ To avoid conflicts and minimize the risks of misunderstandings, diplomatic channels can be used. But our main message to Russia is, of course, that we will defend every inch of allied territory.

We have strengthened our deterrence and defence capabilities. We have mobilized significantly more land, sea and cyber defence forces to our eastern flank.

So the message is very clear. There is no room for misunderstandings or deliberate attacks on NATO territory.

■ One of the biggest threats to Moldova's security is Russia's hybrid war against Moldova. We refer here in particular to propaganda, disinformation, and cyber-attacks. How can NATO help Moldova in this regard when we know that the EU has already sent a civilian mission to Chisinau, whose main mission is to counter and increase resistance to these threats?

■ We understand this phenomenon very well. Not a day goes by without Russia using that threatening rhetoric and trying to destabilize the Republic of Moldova, as well as other countries.

NATO Allies are ready to help the Republic of Moldova strengthen its defence and security capabilities to resist malign external influence.

As you mentioned, hybrid warfare is used a lot by Russia. I know that the EU Partnership Mission is focused on helping Moldova resist hybrid attacks. I have already met with the head of this mission, Mr. Cosmin Dinescu.

NATO is also working to strengthen the resilience of Moldovan society. We have several initiatives in this regard. One of the tools that Russia uses is disinformation, and strategic

communication is indeed part of our programme.

■ Can strategic communication - Stratcom - be improved in the Republic of Moldova? Because there are some complaints that the Moldovan authorities do not have good experience in this field. Can NATO help in this regard?

■ NATO can help, and the Republic of Moldova helps itself. NATO is there to support this goal. We have a professional development programme for civil servants and staff from various ministries in the Republic of Moldova.

In fact, I just opened with a short presentation this morning an information and training programme for civil servants and strategic communication from the Republic of Moldova. It is a programme that has been running for three days already, and another training session was opened today.

At NATO, we also have a centre of excellence in strategic communications. They are our best experts who came here to train Moldovan civil servants in strategic communication and introduce them to some techniques and tactics they could use.

The endgame and objective of this training programme is to build the capacities of the civil service in the Republic of Moldova to train its own civil servants in the future. But I think that Moldovan civil servants, ministers and leaders pay a lot of attention to this, so I am very optimistic that we will see a significant capacity in this regard in the Republic of Moldova in the future.

■ Russian propaganda presents NATO as a scarecrow to Moldovan

citizens. What could be done so that NATO's image is no longer distorted by the Russian propaganda in Moldova and the Alliance is presented in its true colours, as a defensive military alliance that ensures world peace?

■ Our most important tool is the truth. The truth is that NATO is a defensive political and military alliance. NATO is based on the values of democracy and the rule of law.

I had the opportunity to refute these elements of propaganda myself. For example, joining NATO is a sovereign decision of each country. In the past, no member state or ally has joined NATO by force or coercion. They all made their own decisions on this and went through parliamentary processes or referendums on joining NATO. And, of course, all NATO allied countries must agree, because joining NATO is a significant decision and a critical responsibility.

You know the content of Article 5 [NATO treaty] - an attack on one nation is an attack on all - the "Three Musketeers' principle". So when someone joins NATO, they also commit to defending their 31 countries as well as their own territory.

It is not a decision taken easily, but many nations have made this decision and accepted this responsibility, and NATO has only become stronger by the accession of each ally.

Also, another element of propaganda is that NATO uses partnership tools to influence different countries. However, in reality, the partner countries are in the "driver's seat". They are the ones to determine the extent of the relationship with NATO and make their demands and needs known.

And then, we see how we - NATO - can meet these needs. It is these countries that have actually made the decision on the type of relationship they want, as well as the extent of the partnership.

The profession that journalists practice is also essential. The better the Moldovan public understands the notions of deterrence and defense, security issues, and NATO as an alliance, the less they will be influenced by misinformation and malign activities.

The public needs to increase their ability to distinguish between what is genuine information and what is misinformation.

■ **At the recent B9 summit in Bratislava, NATO's eastern flank allies called for strengthening NATO's eastern flank, especially in the Black Sea area (Romania and Bulgaria). How important is it to have a strengthened defence not only in the area of the Baltic States, but also in the Black Sea, where Russia has a massive military presence?**

■ Indeed, the strategic concept we agreed upon at the NATO Summit in Madrid last year identifies the Black Sea as a very important strategic region for NATO. We look at all NATO regions and flanks that are interdependent, so we talk about a "360-degree defence in NATO."

We do not focus on just one region, but on different regions, and the Black Sea is one of them. As you mentioned, Russia has a massive military presence and shows signs of aggression in the Black Sea, which affects the security of allied states such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey.

Also Georgia and, of course, Ukraine, which is unfortunately facing

aggression from Russia. Russia uses the Black Sea to reach the Mediterranean and other regions. The Republic of Moldova is also very close to this region.

We have increased our presence in the region. In Bulgaria and Romania, we have established battle groups and, according to some decisions made last year in Madrid, these battle groups will be able to reach brigade level. Some exercises also take place in this regard. We have also improved air policing missions in the region, so we are present and have increased our deterrence and defence capabilities.

■ **There is always talk of military aid for Ukraine from the EU and NATO states. Do you consider the military assistance that Ukraine receives today sufficient at this stage? Can NATO countries supply Ukraine with more military equipment to resist Russian invasion?**

■ There is considerable willingness on the part of NATO to continue to support Ukraine. The EU and NATO allies have all been very active in this regard. Billions of euros in military equipment have already been donated to Ukraine.

Ukraine's needs evolved over the course of the war, and so did the supplies. First of all, in the beginning it was about more anti-tank equipment. Now it's about heavier weapons, air defence systems, tanks and the supply of fighter jets.

So as the needs of the Ukrainians evolved, the assistance folded into their needs. NATO provides non-lethal military aid that makes a difference every day on the battlefield.

First of all, the Ukrainian courage and creative use of whatever tools

and weapons they have is worth mentioning. Second, this aid to Ukraine was essential to ensure that Ukraine continues its successes on the battlefield.

■ **Should we expect a prolonged war? US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin recently said that the war in Ukraine is a “marathon, not a sprint” and that America will “stand with Ukraine on the long term”. How do you rate the duration of this war?**

■ It's already been 16 months of war in Ukraine, so it's clear, it's not just “a sprint”. But the message is that we are there to support this “marathon”. We are here for the long term with Ukraine and will support it as long as it takes.

We are all looking at the aftermath of war. It is very important in the short term to help Ukraine as long as the war lasts, so that this country can win and then reach a fair peace agreement for Kiev.

We also have a multi-year strategic transition programme that will continue to bring Ukraine closer to NATO and make it more interoperable with NATO.

So it is a multi-year programme with solid funding and a series of initiatives and projects. The idea is to break this toxic cycle of Russian aggression every few years and help Ukraine get those deterrence and defense capabilities against Russia that we were talking about.

■ **What can you tell us about the NATO summit in Vilnius? What will be the main topics that the allies will address and what are the general expectations from this summit? What priority issues will be discussed?**

■ When our leaders meet in Vilnius, they will take decisions to strengthen

the Alliance and make it more agile. First, we have our deterrence and defense initiatives. These include forces and command structures and prepositioning of supplies, but also enhancing defence industry capabilities.

And again, we want to give Ukraine a strong signal of support without a time limit. A multi-year transition programme, as mentioned, will be operational to strengthen Ukraine's interoperability with NATO and bring Ukraine even closer to the Alliance.

We are also intensifying political efforts in our relationship with Ukraine. The NATO-Ukraine Commission will move to a stage of the NATO-Ukraine Council, where Ukraine will sit with allies as equal partners and discuss matters of great importance.

Thirdly, I will mention our partners, including the Republic of Moldova, whom we will continue to support politically and practically. We want to strengthen our ability to help partners like the Republic of Moldova resist Russian pressure, especially the hybrid pressure they face.

■ **We saw last year that Moldova was included in the final declaration of the NATO summit in Madrid. Should we expect to talk more about Moldova at the NATO summit in Vilnius?**

■ Moldova was frequently mentioned in statements at NATO summits, but it was not the first time and it certainly won't be the last time. I expect that in the final communiqué the Republic of Moldova will be mentioned, especially the support for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, which has always been essential for all allies.

■ **I have one last question. Are you optimistic that Sweden, which has maintained its neutrality for about 200 years, will soon become a NATO member? What gain would it be for the Alliance to have such a country in its ranks? Please tell us more.**

■ Sweden is a solid and very close NATO partner, along with Finland. We have cooperated on a variety of issues in the past with Sweden. Sweden has also contributed to our operations and missions in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and many extensive exercises. Sweden is a very resilient country.

Like Finland, Sweden is a role model for other allies, offering several capabilities: a strong defence industry, a robust and resilient society, and a good partnership with the private sector in civilian training.

It will certainly strengthen the Alliance. If you also look at the map, the Baltic region will be safer with Sweden inside the Alliance. Of course, Sweden will also be safer within NATO.

■ **Do you have a message for Moldovan citizens regarding NATO? As we talked about, part of the population of the Republic of Moldova sees NATO as equal to war or in the wrong colours. What would you say to those who are sceptical about NATO?**

■ I would say that NATO is a defensive alliance. It respects the neutrality, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova.

Moldova is in the “driver's seat” (decides) in this relationship and we are ready to help in any way the Republic of Moldova would like us to.

■ **Thank you!**

Editorial

Moldova after the NATO summit in Vilnius: between increasing cooperation and respecting constitutional neutrality

Dionis Cenușă, analist politic

The security of the Republic of Moldova remains on the agenda of the Western partners, but, at the same time, it acquires new nuances. During the recent summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which took place in Vilnius, on 11-12 July 2023, the situation in Moldova was highlighted. On this occasion, NATO spoke categorically against external interference in the Moldovan internal affairs, indirectly considering Russia. In addition to reiterating political support for the reform agenda of the Moldovan government, NATO promised to increase practical assistance in the field of defence and security according to Chisinau's requests.

NATO's increased interest in Moldova is fuelled by the consequences of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. In parallel, Moldova gravitates towards NATO because it feels more acutely the pressure of hybrid threats and those deriving from the perpetuation of the Transnistrian conflict. Given that the dialogue between both sides is on the rise, either at Chisinau's suggestion or on its own initiative, NATO decided to emphasize, in the Vilnius declaration, that it respects Moldova's constitutional neutrality. Despite the pro-NATO sympathies of the Moldovan leadership, the status of neutrality limits bilateral cooperation.



Never before haven't the declarations at the NATO summits expressly mentioned the Alliance's respect for the military neutrality of the Republic of Moldova. The pro-Russian forces in the country insist on the need to maintain neutrality, which interpret the intensification of the NATO-Moldova dialogue as an attempt to "de-neutralize" the country. NATO's emphasis on neutrality in Vilnius can be a useful thing for the public communication of the Moldovan government, often accused by the pro-Russian opposition of neglecting the constitutional provisions and wanting to abandon the neutrality status.

NATO's political attention towards Moldova is increasing

In a simple comparison of the results of the Vilnius NATO summit in 2023

with those of the 2022 Madrid NATO Summit a more pronounced opening of the Alliance in relation to Moldova is observed. Even if Moldova was more vulnerable last year, NATO had shown, in the Madrid declaration, a more modest attitude towards Moldovan insecurities. Last year, Moldova was mentioned together with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia respectively. Also then, without looking at them separately, NATO promised the three countries assistance to protect the integrity, resilience, and development of defence capabilities.

At the Vilnius summit, the attention towards Moldova was more nuanced and comprehensive. This may be due to a more accurate diagnosis of the risks on the part of the Alliance regarding the situation in the country, but also to the fact that the government in

Chisinau has developed closer contacts with Western partners during the last year. The amplification of the political and strategic dialogue with NATO is primarily aimed at improving the level of preparation to resist Russian threats. Additionally, Moldova's approach to NATO should aim at managing the cross-border consequences of the war in Ukraine, including aspects related to the protection against potential radioactive disasters on the population.

In addition to the participation of the representative of the Government, Nicu Popescu, at the summit in Vilnius, NATO included in its statement support for the efforts of the Moldovan government in the implementation of democratic reforms. The EU has the same type of political discourse towards the Moldovan government in the context of the pre-accession dialogue. For the first time, NATO addresses in its declaration the European integration of Moldova, which emerges from the fact that the country obtained the status of a candidate country in June 2022. At the same time, while in relation to Moldova the Alliance promises to support it in the advancement of European integration, in the case of Ukraine and Georgia, it only spoke about the prospects of joining NATO. Through the Vilnius declaration, it seems that NATO offers a credit of confidence to the Moldovan leadership, which in turn relies heavily on Western support to preserve political stability in the country.

Commitments of the North Atlantic Alliance

In the context of geopolitical instability in the region, NATO suggested in Vilnius a series of political and technical commitments towards Moldova. Some aspects are repetitive, being similar to the messages from the declarations of the previous summits. However, among the six NATO summits

organized between 2016 and 2023, the one in Vilnius produced the most comprehensive declaration regarding Moldova:

Primo, the alliance reconfirmed its support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Moldova.

Secundo, as in the case of other previous declarations, NATO demands from Russia to withdraw its military forces from Moldova, where they are stationed without the consent of the Moldovan side. Also, unlike the summits in Brussels in 2018 and 2021, the one in Vilnius, like the one in Madrid, does not ask Russia to contribute constructively to the solution of the Transnistrian conflict (*see below*). It is clear that the West does not have the slightest confidence in Russia's motivation to resolve the "frozen conflicts", at least while it is waging an all-out war against Ukraine.

Declarations of NATO summits with direct references to Russia in the context of Moldova, 2016 – 2023

NATO Summits NATO	Direct references to Russia
Vilnius, 2023	<i>Russia is called to withdraw its troops from the Transnistrian region.</i>
Madrid, 2022	<i>Russia is called to withdraw its troops from the Transnistrian region.</i>
Brussels, 2021	<i>Russia is invited to contribute constructively to the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.</i>
Brussels, 2018	<i>Russia is called to withdraw its troops from the Transnistrian region.</i> <i>Russia is invited to contribute constructively to the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.</i>
Warsaw, 2016	-

Source: *Compilation by the author with reference to nato.int*

Tertio, NATO speaks in favour of Moldova's sovereignty regarding decisions related to its foreign policy, which must

take place without interference from outside. It is obvious that the pro-Western orientation of the Moldovan government and Russia's attempts to influence this process through interference and pressure are meant.

Cuarto, NATO expresses its willingness to provide political and practical support to strengthen Moldova's resilience, so as to ensure the minimum conditions necessary for the country to remain independent.

Quinto, in addition to supporting democratic reforms, NATO is interested in helping Moldova in the field of European integration. This may particularly concern the defence and security sector, including in the civil domain, with a focus on crisis and natural disaster management.

Sexto and the last aspect of the Vilnius summit declaration regarding Moldova aims at the continuation of technical and institutional assistance through the NATO Defence Capacity Building Package. This type of assistance is not something new and has been offered to Moldova since 2015. The need to update and expand the areas of intervention within this "assistance package" was discussed during the summit in Madrid last year. Confirmation of the new "package" took place in February 2023.

At that time, the Ministry of Defence stressed that the priority of the revised "assistance package" lies in combating hybrid threats and developing capabilities in the field of strategic communication and public diplomacy. However, effective implementation of this assistance will benefit the national defence sector as a whole. NATO can provide help according to the requests of the Moldovan side in the following areas: strategic planning and personnel management; the professionalization of civilian personnel and the management

of ammunition stocks; emergency preparedness, including defence against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats; cyber security etc. Aspects related to hybrid threats considered by NATO are also part of the portfolio of the new EU civilian mission in Moldova (EUPM), launched in spring 2023. For this reason, it is important that NATO assistance is complementary to that offered by the EU and vice versa.

Conclusions

The Vilnius Summit reiterated that Moldova's security is on the

agenda of external partners, who are willing to allocate resources to strengthen the Moldovan defence and security sector. Even so, the Alliance is aware of the political constraints of bilateral cooperation with Moldova, which stem from the country's constitutional neutrality. In order to prevent speculation promoted by pro-Russian forces that NATO-Moldova cooperation would go beyond the constitutional framework, NATO emphasized that it respects Moldova's constitutional neutrality.

The alliance showed a better understanding of Moldova's vulnerabilities in the field of security, taking into account the latest developments in the country regarding the European integration process. Finally, the Alliance signalled that it supports politically the government in Chisinau, appreciating its efforts in the field of reforms, subject to criticism by the opposition at home. The government of Moldova is aware of the fact that the stability of the country depends on both the technical assistance and the political support of the West, including that provided by NATO.

Politicians, high-ranking officials, especially those in the security field, should explain in a pragmatic way to the citizens what our relationship with NATO means

Andrei Curararu, WatchDog Community's international relations expert and university lecturer at ULIM, spoke in an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter about the results of the NATO summit in Vilnius and its implications for the Republic of Moldova. We also discussed about the Russian anti-NATO propaganda and how it can shape public perception of this eminently defensive alliance that has maintained the peace on the European continent since the end of World War II until the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We invite you to read the interview with the WatchDog expert in detail:

■ At the Vilnius Summit, NATO requested from Russia to withdraw all its forces stationed in the Transnistrian region without the consent of the



Republic of Moldova. A week earlier, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly requested the same. Could this pressure that is being put on Russia by the West somehow bear fruit?

■ There are four elements here that I would highlight in relation to the declaration of the NATO Summit in Vilnius. The withdrawal of illegally stationed troops was demanded, being

underlined the need to strengthen the resilience and independence of the Republic of Moldova, support to the European course, which is unprecedented for us, but also electoral and political reforms related to the rule of law.

This shows that NATO transcends the military dimension, being also an eminently political alliance. Also, the final declaration of the NATO Summit also supports the guarantee of the neutrality and constitutional principles of the Republic of Moldova. No matter how much some politicians from our country talk about NATO as a “scarecrow”, the North Atlantic Alliance respects the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova and cannot afford to neglect these principles. This must be said clearly and repeatedly, because it is our duty to set the course of foreign policy.

What we see in general is that several organizations that were amorphous and less active are revitalizing against the background of the conflict in Ukraine. They realize that in the context of the Transnistrian conflict they were not effective. If we think about the OSCE, it had an extremely important role in the 5+2 negotiation format, but later its emissaries were simple “political tourists” who just came and talked, and it was no longer clear what exactly was happening within this regulatory process.

Recently, the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE has come up with an opinion, which caused a vehement reaction from the separatist regime in Transnistria. The latter said it was an interference. On the other hand, NATO, which previously tempered such statements that could have created tensions, is changing its approach.

We saw 30,000 Ukrainian flags with the call to make Ukraine a NATO member today. We understand that not all Alliance members are on the same page. Each member of NATO has its own

position on this matter. In the case of our country, we enjoy unprecedented support and this is very important. This fact must be capitalized including by pressure from Chisinau for the release of political prisoners, re-launch of negotiations, ensuring the guarantees of respect for human rights in the region, but also for our schools there. There is a need for a normalization of relations and understanding of post-conflict situation.

We all remember the initiative launched by Prime Minister Dorin Recean, which, I assume, was coordinated with the Ukrainian side, to demilitarize the area, a fact that could be coherently integrated in these current statements.

■ **Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said during the Vilnius Summit that Vladimir Putin made a mistake when he underestimated NATO’s aid to Ukraine. He also said that NATO will not let Russia win in Ukraine under any circumstances because it would show that Russia can attack anyone at any time and it would be a disastrous defeat for Ukraine. Is it possible that we will witness a war that will last many years from now?**

■ I think it’s difficult to estimate, but what we’re seeing from NATO is that Russia takes precedence over China, which is one of the biggest threats to the global security, and that’s changing the previous narratives of the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest.

That is, the Russian Federation is almost back to its Cold War posture when it was seen as an obstacle to global development. We’ve seen that in the statements made at this summit the incident at Khahovka [break of the dam on the Dnieper] was also mentioned. Ultimately we are in a situation where NATO recognizes that the threat posed by the Russian Federation is greater than it has ever been.

It is necessary to expand the military capabilities of Ukraine because

without some effective armed forces, without parity or air dominance, we cannot talk about a happy or quick end to this war.

There are several international voices, but also among the Russian opposition, that it is necessary for the fire to cease in Ukraine and to proceed to negotiations. In my opinion, this will give time for the build-up of forces on the part of Russia and we will have a return to this intense and kinetic conflict.

We are talking about a war in Ukraine that has been going on for over 500 days, an extremely long war for the 21st century. I also understand the frustration of NATO forces to deliver what is needed there, because we are talking about a direct armed conflict with a nuclear country.

You never know when those red lines are close to being crossed, but apparently those red lines are moving. Ukraine is on an offensive which is not only military, but also diplomatic and of communication.

That apparent disappointment, which existed on the part of Ukraine, was related to the fact that ordinary people also began to believe in this offensive. I saw everywhere the message that Ukraine must be in NATO.

■ **Are the accents also shifting a bit domestically in Ukraine? As the narrative is that the military’s slow advance on the counter-offensive is caused by the NATO not welcoming Ukraine into its ranks.**

■ I believe they are interdependent, and without greater NATO support, we cannot talk about an effective counter-offensive. This will not like the previous one in Kherson, because there Russia had failed to build fortifications. Here we are talking about a war of positions, without air

dominance, because you have to send the military into minefields. And then we are talking about costs that no one can assume, including President Zelensky.

This is where the frustration of the Kiev leader comes from, who thought that maybe a concrete date would come for the country's accession to NATO. But I think that, although apparently frustrated, Ukraine achieved good results at this Summit in Vilnius.

Here we can also mention the case of Georgia, which is somehow more advanced in the Euro-Atlantic integration than in the European integration, but is very low in NATO's priorities. This is about democratic issues and so on. If we can say that Ukraine is at the fourth stage of joining NATO, Georgia remains at the second stage, although both have expressed their desire since 2008.

And this is still going on, because the next stage for Ukraine is the implementation of reforms, then the assessment and decision at the NATO level, the ratification by all the parliaments of the NATO countries, and then you become a NATO member. We are talking here about a years-long perspective. It is the same, for example, with the European integration process of Moldova.

In this sense, I understand that Ukraine's communication plan at the NATO Summit in Vilnius was also a strategic one, namely to get as much as possible at this Summit.

■ **In a recent survey carried out in the Republic of Moldova, we saw that there is a trend, even if still timid, that the Moldovan citizens are no longer refractory to the idea of NATO. The survey showed that 28 percent would vote for the accession of the Republic of Moldova to NATO, while 60 percent would not agree. What tools do you see as applicable to improve the given**

image in the collective mind of the Moldovan citizens?

■ The biggest "supporter" of NATO expansion is Vladimir Putin and his government who, through their violent actions, create the context in traditionally neutral societies like Sweden or Finland, a desire to become NATO members.

It was said in the same context that NATO's rapid reaction force is increasing from 40,000 to 300,000 soldiers, which is a formidable capacity of NATO to guarantee security. The citizens of the Republic of Moldova see war as the first danger. And then what? Do we remain in positions of apparent neutrality and are between two large military blocs or do we try to actively ensure our security?

Here there is also a very important thing to do, from my point of view, namely to destroy the image of NATO since the 90s and those myths about NATO presented as an "evil force" that tries to dominate the continent and limit the national sovereignty.

Now we see that in order to enter NATO, countries like Sweden promise to revive Turkey's European integration process. And Norway is ready to contribute one billion euros to the NATO budget.

Security costs money and when every citizen of the Republic of Moldova understands very clearly the western-style and eastern-style security, I think the number of NATO supporters will be higher.

■ **Perhaps a more active phase of the war will cause a reaction in the society of the Republic of Moldova? Hopefully that won't be the factor, but if the situation had been worse in Odessa, do you think the number of NATO supporters would have been higher among Moldovans?**

■ Unfortunately, we have a reactive society that thinks about issues like

energy security, which, by the way, is among NATO's priorities. This society is active only when the pocket hurts or when the war is near.

■ **NATO has left open a window of opportunity for the Republic of Moldova. As in the case of the EU membership, this window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely. What should the authorities in Chisinau do in this regard, should they increase their proximity to NATO or not?**

■ For this we need social consensus and we need a critical mass that may be less than 50% to support this idea, in order to move things forward, so that the simple citizen understands very well that NATO is not a scary and that the Russian narratives, including about the conflict with Serbia in the 90s, are very far from reality.

Now we are seeing an unprecedented offensive, and the statements of the former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev who say that the Third World War is coming and that this alliance that is approaching the Russian Federation must be liquidated are telling in this regard.

It is approaching Russia because the latter is dangerous. When Russia was a relatively normal and peaceful communicating state, the situation was different. Even Vladimir Putin admitted that at one point he asked US President George Bush what it would be like if Russia applied to join NATO. Bush hesitated to answer him then, understanding that such a prospect was not exactly imminent.

For the Republic of Moldova, I think it is essential to understand what we want in terms of security. We want to try to increase security by our own forces, by increasing defence spending what could be directed to education or something else. Or to maintain this facade neutrality which, I would say, is not even

useful in the context of the situation in Ukraine and the Transnistrian conflict. Or to educate our own citizens to overcome those myths about NATO that our society believes in.

■ **Do you think the Moldovan pro-European politicians in power should address the topic of NATO more often in order to shape a real perception of what the North Atlantic Alliance actually is, namely a defensive one that does not attack anyone?**

■ In my opinion, it is also the responsibility of the politicians, in the

context in which we have a relationship with NATO and this is exploited in the pro-Russian narratives, according to which the Republic of Moldova would militarize and be drawn into the war in Ukraine, etc.

Politicians, high-ranking officials, especially those in the security field, should explain in a pragmatic way to the citizen what our relationship with NATO means and how we could deepen it, and what are its implications.

This relationship must remain quite open and at a comfortable distance, including

for those who will never, by definition or identity, accept European integration. At least one mission to defuse old shells from the Republic of Moldova with the participation of the NATO troops or funding should be accepted.

Step by step, we can thus reach an understanding. We have to see if we can go forward including with the Euro-Atlantic integration [in the EU and NATO] to reduce defence and security spending.

■ **Thank you!**

SECURITY & DEFENCE DIGEST



The Platform for Security and Defense Initiatives

The results of the NATO Summit in Vilnius: regional configurations and implications for the Republic of Moldova

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization Summit in Vilnius, which took place on 11-12 July 2023, was one of the most important in the Alliance's recent history, with profound implications for its allies and partners. A little earlier, the military invasion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine led neutral countries such as Finland and Sweden to opt for NATO membership, and others to intensify their cooperation with it, such as the Republic of Moldova, which marked a substantial advance in its relations with the Alliance. And Ukraine, with strong aspirations to become a member country, after almost a year and a half of war, is slowly starting the long-awaited counter-offensive, which, according to some experts, could be a decisive boost in their fight to reclaim the land held by Russia since 2014.

In Moscow, Vladimir Putin's power has been tested by Wagner's Chief revolt, while the future command of Russian forces in Ukraine remains uncertain. Amid these developments, Western support for Kiev has intensified, especially

as the US approves the transfer of cluster munitions to Ukraine, while the UK and France provide long-range weapons capable of striking Crimea. More recently, the Crimean bridge or "Putin's Bridge", considered a strategic but

also symbolic bridge, was set on fire as a result of explosions on the morning of July 17. In this context, the regional security environment remains fragile and uncertain, and beyond the success of the NATO Summit in Vilnius, there are remaining cracks in the NATO alliance, while Ukraine's future in NATO is far from certain.

Why are NATO Summit events of major interest?

Beyond the fact that NATO's high-level meetings (which usually take place once every two years) provide periodic opportunities for heads of state and government of member

countries to assess and provide strategic direction for the Alliance's activities, since 2014 these meetings have to make decisions in situations of uncertainty for both allies and regional security. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO has had to redefine its defense policies in the context of several geopolitical reconfigurations, and the expectations from the Vilnius summit have also been somewhat raised in line with these changes.

We are reminding the following the Second World War, the creation of NATO appeared as a defensive shield to counter a possible Soviet expansion. With the end of the Cold War, however, doubts arose about NATO's continued usefulness in an environment where Soviet power no longer posed an immediate danger. Illustrating its flexibility, NATO has expanded its approach from *mutual defence* to broader participation through *cooperative security*, with a focus on human security and crisis management.

The start of the new millennium signaled a new phase for NATO in the wake of the devastating terrorist acts of 11 September 2001, highlighting the need for a unified approach to threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In the following year after the tragic events in New York, the Rome Summit (2002) was considered an exceptional summit at the level of heads of state and government by creating the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) based on relations of reciprocity, cooperation, and security. In 2008, during the NATO Summit in Bucharest, when the NRC also met, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, declared that Ukraine is an *artificial formation* and a *mistake in history*, emphasizing power interests over

the so-called *close neighborhood* of which the Republic of Moldova is also a part. No less important was the NATO Summit in Lisbon in 2010 that adopted the Alliance's New Strategic Concept, setting its strategic priorities for 10 years. And together with Russia, NATO allies agreed at the NRC meeting on a joint analysis of security threats in the 21st century, deciding to jointly expand support for Afghanistan.

As for the 2012 Summit held in Chicago, the *Smart Defense* initiative was adopted – NATO leaders agreed to share the costs of weapons and equipment as a consequence of shrinking defence budgets and the absence of a direct military threat as it was during the Cold War. Moreover, this initiative was supposed to make Europe more responsible for its own security. However, two years after the adoption of NATO's *smart defence* vision, the events in the Black Sea region have led the Alliance to improve its defensive capabilities and strengthen its ability to protect and defend member countries both at sea and on land, as well as focus on countering cyber threats. Thus, after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the NATO Summit in Wales set out adaptation measures to ensure that members could quickly address security challenges (e.g. creation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, designed to improve NATO's response force). At the same time, initiatives were promoted in the framework of the strategic partnership with Georgia and the Republic of Moldova.

In the context of the latest events, Russia's military invasion of Ukraine is considered the catalyst for NATO's increased and solidarity commitments: since 2022, four high-level NATO meetings have been held, which addressed

the implications of the war in Ukraine on the security of the member states, the accession of new members, but also concerns about the rise of great powers, such as China. Although there was a constant message of solidarity with the Ukrainian people at these meetings, at the Vilnius Summit the Allies agreed on a clearer package to bring Ukraine closer to NATO. However, the joint final declaration of the Vilnius summit, according to some experts, resembles that of the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, with ambitious promises that Kiev will become a member state at some point in the future and an invitation will be dispatched *when allies agree and certain conditions are met*, no Action Plan being required.

The main promises and findings of the NATO Summit in Vilnius

The forum had an extensive format and brought together senior officials, renowned experts from member states, and NATO partners. There are several opinions regarding the results of the Summit. According to the metaphor "*a mixed bag but with signs of quiet progress*", although the summit was indeed a meeting of unity and positioning as a global actor, its results are complex, with a mix of issues to be discussed at the next Summit in the USA.

Thus, despite high hopes and a strong moral argument, Ukraine has not been given a timetable for joining NATO. However, a set of initiatives were aimed directly at Ukraine, such as a multi-year defence assistance programme, to meet critical needs. Moreover, a new NATO-Ukraine Defence Council was established – a framework for enhanced political cooperation and

platform for decision-making and crisis consultation, where Ukraine will be considered equal to NATO allies and deliberate on security issues of common interest. Also here, it should be mentioned the approval of an unprecedented package of assistance from NATO to Ukraine bilaterally with the G7 countries, which committed themselves during the summit to provide long-term military support to Ukraine. The bilateral agreements would also include reconstruction and recovery efforts for the neighbouring country. Although in the Republic of Moldova there is less talk of the G7 perspective, the latter is an instrument of bilateral cooperation in the field of defense.

Also, decisions were made on strengthening the defence capabilities by increasing spending and strengthening deterrence capabilities, especially on the Eastern Flank of the Alliance, providing *the most comprehensive defence plan since the end of the Cold War*, to counter two main threats of NATO – Russia and terrorism. The first plan covers the Atlantic area and Arctic Europe, the second covers the Baltic countries and Central Europe, and the third plan, which includes Romania, covers the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. As a preventive measure, with the adoption of these defence plans, NATO decided to develop and build new defence infrastructures, as the war in Ukraine showed that it is important that the air defence is in line with the missile defence.

We cannot neglect the fact that the Indo-Pacific region was also on the discussion agenda. In fact, at the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, when a new Strategic Concept was adopted, it was recognized that developments in the region directly

affect the Euro-Atlantic security, underscoring that the Alliance faces *the systemic competition* from Beijing. Accordingly, and at the latest Summit, the Allies maintain their growing concerns about Russian-Chinese attempts to reshape the world order, stating that Alliance members will work together to *protect against China's coercive behaviour*. However, the NATO member states differ in how to address concerns over their reliance on Chinese investment and bilateral trade. Beijing accounts for almost 20 percent of European imports and 10 percent of exports.

Last but not least, Turkey confirmed “*last-minute*” Sweden’s acceptance of joining the Alliance - a mutually beneficial decision. Indeed, the accession of Finland, and then Sweden, will strengthen the northern flank of the Alliance, including the integration of a new generation of Swedish submarines in the Baltic Sea and Finnish F-35 fighter jets. NATO will have access to new territories and their infrastructure, including expanded rail networks, allowing for an increased ability to transport reinforcements and equipment in the event of an unexpected escalation in relations with Russia.

The participation of the Moldovan delegation in the Vilnius Summit - an intensification of relations with NATO?

For the first time, the Republic of Moldova participated in the NATO Summit in 2014, in Wales, invited to take part in the NATO initiative to strengthen the defence capacity. However, the scale of relations between the Republic of Moldova and NATO increased significantly after the beginning of the war in

Ukraine. At the same time, NATO support for the Republic of Moldova is increasing both politically and in practical terms, to the extent Moldova wants this based on the principle of reciprocity.

Previously, in November 2022, the Republic of Moldova participated for the first time in the meeting of foreign ministers of NATO member states, which took place in Bucharest - a meeting to which the ministers of Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were also invited to discuss the NATO support for strengthening their defence and resilience capabilities. Also, an important premiere was NATO’s support for ensuring the security of the EPC Summit in Bulboaca, ensuring the surveillance of the airspace of the Republic of Moldova. The political support is felt not only in the speeches of the Alliance officials, but also through high-ranking visits to the Republic of Moldova. For example, recently, Admiral R. Bauer had meetings with parliamentarians, the prime minister and members of the Government - the first visit of a President of the NATO Military Committee to the Republic of Moldova.

Returning to the summit in Vilnius, the position regarding the Republic of Moldova was included in the final declaration. The delegation of the Republic of Moldova was satisfied with the results, as a separate article refers directly to the Republic of Moldova, with a more concrete content than art. 116 of the 2016 Warsaw Summit Declaration. Thus, in art. 81, the leaders of the NATO countries reiterated their support for: (i) the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders, expressly demanding Russia to withdraw all its

forces stationed in the Transnistrian region without the consent of the Republic of Moldova; (ii) Moldova's right to decide its own future and foreign policy course, without external interference, expressing respect for Moldova's constitutional neutrality; (iii) democratic reforms as the country moves forward in the European integration process; (iv) strengthening security and defence capacity through the enhanced Defence Capacity Building (DCB) package.

Actually, the declaration does not essentially contain anything new, it is a matter of existing phrases based on the cooperation framework of the Republic of Moldova with NATO, however, they are clear messages of support for the political independence of the state. In addition, it is obvious that NATO is concerned about Russia's use of pro-Russian and oligarchic political parties in the Republic of Moldova to maintain its influence, undermining the country's European path.

Another important aspect of the statement refers to the allies' firm request to Russia to withdraw its military troops and ammunition from the territory of the Republic of Moldova. This would mean that there are prerequisites for creating the necessary conditions that could

cause/force Russia to withdraw its military contingent. This is also due to the fact that the Russian forces in Transnistria can no longer benefit from logistical supplies except with the agreement of Chisinau, and in the context of the deterioration of relations between Moscow and Chisinau and Russia's failure in Ukraine, Russia's political-military objective of keeping its forces in Transnistria is becoming unsustainable.

Regarding the commitment to provide support to the country within the DCB package, at the Summit there were clear signals to the Allies that the financial or material contribution to the trust fund intended for the financing of projects from the list of those approved for Moldova is requested. Also at this Summit we witnessed the first practical commitment in this regard, which came from Romania through the statement of President Klaus Iohannis, who pleaded for the support of vulnerable partners, announcing a new financial contribution from Romania for our country. It is also worth drawing attention to the fact that Romania is becoming an important actor in the third NATO defence plan aimed at the south-east and south of the North Atlantic Alliance. Moreover, it is the first time in NATO's history that the Black

Sea is explicitly mentioned in the final document.

Conclusions

NATO is becoming increasingly diverse and divergent as an alliance, and the individual approaches of all member states will continue to reflect this. However, NATO still operates on the principle of consensus, and if Ukraine joins the Alliance, it will only be the result of a unanimous decision taken by the alliance. At the same time, due to the considerable support given to Ukraine by NATO, as well as by the provision of additional security guarantees by the G7, the Republic of Moldova also becomes a beneficiary, considering its geographical position.

Although we can see that the cooperative relations between the Republic of Moldova and NATO are becoming guided by the principle of reciprocity, however, there is a lack of effective strategic communication in promoting the tools and mechanisms for ensuring national security and defence as a result of NATO support. According to the results of the latest national opinion polls, a large part of society cannot accept the new paradigm of relations with NATO, being still influenced by the Russian propaganda.

The opinions expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) or of the Foreign Policy Association (APE).