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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates


TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. The new head of the EU Delegation to Chisinau, **Pirkka Tapiola**, speaks about the priorities of his mandate and the perspectives of the Moldova-EU relations.
2. Is Chisinau ready for the EaP Summit in Vilnius? An interview with the deputy foreign minister **Iulian Groza**.
3. European Integration –national idea or electoral crock? An editorial by the executive director of the Foreign Policy Association, **Victor Chirilă**.
4. Director of ESTEP Lithuania, **Klaudijus Maniokas**, says that signature of the AAs between EU and Moldova and Ukraine is a geopolitical issue and that not even after Vilnius Russia will renounce its pressure.

The last period has been marked by a series of important developments for the Republic of Moldova.

 The Russian Sanitary Service banned on Sep 10 the wine imports from the Republic of Moldova. According to the chief of the Russian Sanitary Service, Ghenadii Onishchenko, "an exaggerated quantity of plasticizers" was found in the Moldovan wines. The gesture was interpreted in Chisinau as political pressure to determine the Republic of Moldova not to sign the AA with EU at the Vilnius EaP Summit in November.

 The second day after this announcement, the Romanian and Polish foreign ministers, Titus Corlăteanu și Radosław Sikorski, have stated that "the economic boycotts are politically-grounded and are unacceptable and illegal" being also inefficient in the long term.

 The European Commissioner for Enlargement, Stefan Füle, has stated in a speech in the European Parliament that "any threat by Russia related to the possible signature of the agreements with the European Union is unacceptable" and that "the European Union will support and defend those against whom pressure is exercised in an unfair manner".

 On September 25, the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Dacian Cioloș, announced that the European Commission suggests opening completely the EU market for the Moldovan wines, stating that the European market is a sustainable alternative for the Moldovan wine sector.

 The United States of America supports the signature of the AA by the Republic of Moldova and the European Union, which will also allow for the access to the European free trade area. Chisinau suggested launching negotiations for a Trade and Investment Agreement with the USA, inviting the American investors to participate in the privatisations which have been announced recently by Chisinau. The discussions took place during the visits in the USA of the foreign minister Natalia Gherman and the Prime Minister Iurie Leanca, in the second half of September.

After taking over the mandate on the 1st of September, the new head of the EU Delegation to Chisinau, Pirkka Tapiola, has stated that his three main priorities are the adoption of the AA between the Republic of Moldova and EU, joint work with the Moldovan Government in implementing the reform agenda and finding a viable solution to the Transnistrian conflict.

Pirkka Tapiola: We would be bad friends if offering assistance we did not draw the attention to the problems of the Republic of Moldova



The new head of the EU Delegation to Chisinau, Pirkka Tapiola, who took over the mandate on September 1st, has had

meetings with political leaders and Chisinau officials. In an interview given to us, he spoke about the Republic of

Moldova- EU relations and the perspective of these relations, including the problems Moldova needs to solve in order to bring Europe at home, including about the Transnistrian settlement.

I asked Mr Pirkka Tapiola how he sees the relations between the EU and the Republic of Moldova at the beginning of his mandate as head of the EU delegation to the Republic of Moldova and what his priorities are for the next four years.

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** At the beginning of my mandate, now that I've arrived here, I'm coming at a time when the relationship of the Republic of Moldova and the European Union is becoming closer and closer. It's an extremely good relationship. In many ways, Moldova is a front-runner within our Eastern Partnership initiative that can be seen both in the speed in which we have negotiated the Agreement, in progress towards the completion of the visa liberalisation action plan and in terms of the overall dynamic of the relationship.

So based on this, if I look at three priorities which I would have in the coming years, they basically fall under two categories.

The first priority is, of course, to accompany and work in the progress towards bringing the process we are having currently of political association and economic integration to its next stage. The next step will be initialling of the Association Agreement and of the DCFTA in Vilnius and then we will be moving towards hopefully an early signature. We have the visa liberalisation action plan. So, these are the organisational issues, these are the structural issues in our relationship.

The second priority is very closely linked to the first one - these agreements can give a lot to the ordinary Moldovan citizens. They can give a lot to Moldova's economic, political, social development but only if these agreements are fully implemented. Therefore, my second priority is to work together with Moldovan government. I know also that we will have elections next year, so let me underline- with any Moldovan government on fulfilling our shared jointly-agreed reform agenda. And that goes all the way from the problems of political culture

which would mean the strengthening of democracy, judiciary reform, the role of the prosecutor general to the important reforms required in the DCFTA, which is basically a tool of market access for reforms, so to other reforms which go into public administration, the capacity of public administration, rural development, environmental issues, everything so as to really underpin these reforms and make sure that the agreement through a reform agenda is implemented fully and that we can really benefit from our shared agenda and that it will indeed serve the Moldovan people.

A third priority and an important one is the Transnistrian conflict and working towards a sustainable solution, working towards building bridges, confidence between both banks of the Nistru river. This is an incredibly important priority for us all and here I would say that also the success of Moldova's reform agenda will underpin the attractiveness of reunification for the inhabitants of Transnistria.

■ **Lina Grâu:** In Chisinau there are many discussions about the Vilnius moment. What is going to happen at the Vilnius summit in November? And that it what will follow after the summit?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** Vilnius is going to be a very important step in the process of political association and economic integration but this step is most symbolic I would say. This is a process which continues and we should not read Vilnius as an incredible turning point or something like that. What we will do is initial the AA and DCFTA. We hope to be able to say something on where we are going on a shared path towards visa liberalisation regime. We will have the next evaluation mission of the visa liberalisation action plan here in October, so we will know a little bit more at that stage and then after Vilnius, we are going towards signing and ratifying the agreement both here in Chisinau and in Brussels, and the capitals of course. The process of ratification may be a rather lengthy one because we also need to get ratification of 28 partners which is certainly coming but may just take a little bit of time.

So we hope to be able to apply the agreement already provisionally after the

European parliament had its say but what will happen after Vilnius, what needs to happen before Vilnius, is our continued joint work towards the shared commitment in reforms.

■ **Lina Grâu:** In your opinion, has Moldova passed the non-return point in its relations with EU when a come-back to the Eastern sphere of influence is not possible?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** I would hope so. I would certainly hope so. We have been working on this relationship and the deepening of the EU- Moldova relationship for a long time, from the early 2000, under this government and also very much under the former government and during Mr Voronin's presidency.

So, I'd say this is a process and I would not say sort of look at turning points, where we are, is irreversible. I think we all want to see Moldova's path towards consolidating a modern, democratic society with a functioning market economy. We want to get that process in that direction to be irreversible.

■ **Lina Grâu:** As closer we get to the Vilnius summit, the critical voices saying that DCFTA with EU will be a serious challenge for the domestic producers and will imply certain risks are growing stronger. What is your reply to them?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** The benefits of the DCFTA can be considerable in terms of economic growth, jobs, and possibilities. I've already mentioned that the DCFTA is a reform tool, a transformation tool. We can look at two things in life: one is that you take steps which will bring immediate benefit but which will leave the country still in the longer term – short of fulfilling the full potential. The DCFTA is something which will not of course, be an overnight change of things. It is about transformation, which means it is about empowering, enabling Moldovan businesses and Moldovan citizens to build a more sustainable and wealthier future.

I'd say that the opinions that you referred to, to my mind, are often based on very short-term calculations and on what will happen immediately. Yes, in the short-term,

things will require a transformation which is not always easy. In the long term, what it does give countries is solidity, strength, and structural backbone on which to build. And I think that for the future of Moldova's success this would be the most important question.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What is in your opinion the future of the Eastern Partnership? Does EU have a plan for this region? Can Moldova become EU member in an average perspective of 10-15 years?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** I often hear it in this region and I have been working with this region for a long time. This whole issue of plan- I find it sometimes a bit amusing. As if EU would have some kind of an overarching geopolitical plan which would be there to increase influence or something like that. This is not the case. Through the Eastern Partnership, we have been responding in a very consistent manner to a demand in the region, a demand for European reforms, a demand for coming closer to the European Union. This is a process. We have moved from talking about a partnership or partnership and cooperation to something of political association and economic integration. This is already a step forward which brings a lot more opportunities, shared responsibilities and so on and so forth.

At this moment we are not in the situation of saying where this process will end. But for our European partners and European neighbours it is said very clearly that no agreement which we sign now would prejudice the future deepening of relations and it depends I think very much on the quality of Moldova's democracy, the quality of Moldova's judiciary, market economy and performance that we will be able to see how far we will go.

European integration is a process and it is not a step of political decisions. It is really a process of approximation, changing, transforming and time will show.

■ **Lina Grâu:** I asked the head of the EU Delegation to Moldova if he likes Moldovan wines.

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** Very much. And there are excellent wines in Moldova and the quality

ever since I've started working with Moldova in different capacities in 2005 has changed. And if I look at the wine industry and the development of quality from those days it has been phenomenal.

■ **Lina Grâu:** In this context, I would like to ask you about the role of EU in creating a balance and alternative for Moldovan products under the Russian economic pressure, including of the embargo on wine imposed by Russia.

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** It has always been said very clearly that EU has the strictest sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards in the world and we import a lot of Moldovan wine. And if you look at before the wine embargo of 2006, if I remember the figures correctly, Moldova exported about 70%-78% of wine to the Russian Federation. At this moment, as announced officially, the figure is 28%. So, this is a considerable drop and I'd say that the fact that we have been increasing wine quotas combined with the quality of Moldovan wine, and I am not talking about the cleanliness, but quality in terms of taste and enjoyability of Moldovan wine, has improved so you can see that there has been a rather large entry of Moldovan wines into the EU market. They are becoming known both in Central Europe, and I hear from northern European countries that they are becoming more and more popular. And we have taken decision to enable more Moldovan wines into our markets. And then comes the whole structural change – the DCFTA.

If we talk about sanitary and phito-sanitary standards, laboratories, if we talk about the regulatory framework which is put in place, we are putting in place an EU compatible framework together with the Moldovan government, which of course will mean that we will have even better export opportunities not just for wines but also for other agricultural products.

So, I would say that the whole process of transformation which is our shared goal is really a solution in diversifying the Moldovan markets around the world and there is a lot of good Moldovan produce which would need to see an investment climate which brings even more investment, to be able to fully use the quite large potential this small

country has.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Regarding the Transnistrian problem, everybody acknowledges that Transnistria is a geopolitical factor for maintaining the Russian sphere of influence in the region. Together with the European integration process, the Transnistrian conflict has become a problem at the border of EU. How do you see the developments of this problem in future?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** The European Union is an active participant in the settlement process. Since 2005 we have been a member of the "5+2" format. We are a major funder for the settlement process. We are funding confidence building measures with very large amounts of money building bridges between the two banks of the river Nistru. This is a priority and I think that when you say that some say "just leave the conflict there", "let it be frozen", I would very strongly disagree with that because this is a shared interest to find a sustainable solution and that is an important issue for Moldova but also for the European Union in terms of stability and development of the region as a whole.

Now, I was very happy to note yesterday's meeting between Prime Minister Leanca and Transnistrian leader Shevciuk. It was their first meeting in that kind of capacities. It was very important for the two gentlemen to talk, to start building a relationship and I welcome that very much. And looking also at the news, at the press statements which were very balanced from both sides, there was a clear willingness to work together.

Now, Transnistrian conflict is fundamentally important and my own knowledge of the region shows me that there is rather a big amount of people and interests which in fact also want to work with EU. If you look at where Transnistrian industrial exports are going, and the fact that Transnistria has been part of the autonomous trade preferences regime, you will notice that EU is a fundamentally important export market. We hope that we can find solutions where DCFTA which we have will serve the entire population of Moldova, all the Moldovan businesses and bring new opportunities for Transnistrian exporters as well. Reaching out is extremely important here. We need to find that solution based on territorial integrity of

the Republic of Moldova and a special status for Transnistria, one which is a win-win for everybody.

Now, it may be some time difficult to move on the political track but I think there should be no room for complacency. The one needs to not be taken hostage with two square positions and two status-quo. We need to work building those bridges, building that communality. I know it is not going to be that easy after 20 years of separation but it is fundamentally durable that it requires patience, action, openness. And based on this, I was very happy to see yesterday's meeting and hope that there will be much more interaction and of course we will be discussing a number of these issues in the "5+2".

Lina Grău: There are voices in the Moldovan society saying that Transnistria could become an impediment in the process of the Moldova's European Integration and that it might be easier to integrate into the EU without the left bank.

Pirkka Tapiola: One of the issues which I said is that it is very important to really work towards a sustainable settlement which takes the interest of both banks in consideration and brings both banks into a close relationship with the European Union within the agreements we have.

For me it is absolutely clear that when we think of closer relationship, political association and economic integration with the Republic of Moldova, we think of that in terms of the entire Republic of Moldova, not just one side of the river, even if that is the majority side. I would not call Transnistria a problem for Moldova's integration, or coming closer to the European Union. Transnistria is a shared challenge on which we need to work and it is also an opportunity because if you look at the business and the industrial structures of the two sides, they are very complementary. It is an opportunity for all citizens and residents of the Republic of Moldova, it is an opportunity to build something new.

But of course it also brings into our overall relations a fundamental additional issue- that of state building, a nation building, which is a complicated issue in many

countries which were part of the Soviet Union and it is one to which we need to pay a lot of attention.

Lina Grău: You spoke above about the Republic of Moldova as a leader in the region in relations with the EU. Despite that, all the European officials who come to Chisinau underline the fact that there is a series of problems. What should be done in order for Moldova to build Europe at home and what would be the solutions for changing the mentality?

Pirkka Tapiola: We have a lot to do and I think we need to differentiate between two things- one is constructive criticism and the other is support and they are not mutually exclusive. Moldova is doing well under the Eastern partnership and we will not be the right type of friends and partners if we do not identify what the problems of the transition society are and what the problems we need to tackle together are.

The European Union is a major donor. Last year we committed well over 100 mln Euro. Our per capita assistance to the Republic of Moldova is the highest in any neighbouring country. We have been in the position to put the so-called "more for more" funds into Moldova and probably we will continue doing so. Decisions are being taken and we will have to look at the performance and evaluation but that means that if we are here to help our friends, if we are here to work together, to support, we will of course be noting that there are important problems which we meet and we've talked above about some of them- consolidating the democratic society, bringing transparency including into the financial sector, business sector, judicial reform, which is an incredibly important issue. The government here has also very openly admitted that this country still needs to do more in fighting corruption. These are problems that we often see in transition societies and we would be very bad friends of Moldova if we did not underline and also remind: "You are doing great!", "We are close partners", "We are here to support you, to work with you, to bring shared agendas forward". But we are working on a shared value base and for us, countries of the EU, these values are not just empty concepts. These values are interests. They are something where we have to see

that they are values making things work to the benefit of ordinary people. We've seen the benefits of transparency, of functioning democracy and investment climate based on a core system which works in a functioning public administration and the predictability that you do not face corruption. This is what works and we want Moldova to work and we want to work together with Moldova to make Moldova work for its own citizens.

And yes, I will be the first one to praise the successes but I will also be the first as EU representative here to constructively say to our friends: "Look, we still need to work. We still have so many things to do together". But I am confident that we have a strong feeling of community to really start and continue tackling these issues in a consistent manner.

Lina Grău: What is your message for the political class and for the Moldovan society at the beginning of your term?

Pirkka Tapiola: You asked about mentality changes and I do not like using that word "mentality change", because it somehow comes across their judgement. My message is: "Take ownership of your own future". No transition process has worked in Europe or anywhere else just being brought or tried to be dictated from outside. We are not here to dictate. We are here to help. And our societies are very much bottom-up societies. The Soviet Union saw a top-down society where expectations were for the leaders to give and also leaders had the right to a certain amount of privileges because they gave and so on.

That gap between civil society and the elites needs really to be bridged if you want success. You need to have top-down processes where people fundamentally take ownership of issues which concern them, organise themselves, from man-day issues such as the cleanliness of stairways or renovation, to forming political parties, electing their leaders within parties, pressuring the government to be accountable. This is the European way. So take ownership and act based on that ownership. And that's how you evolve slowly into a more consolidated society which will be able to better deliver for everybody. Nobody will deliver for you from above. One needs to deliver for oneself. That would be my message.

Julian Groza: We are taking all the opportunities to engage the Republic of Moldova into an irreversible European process. Our objective is to join the European Union.



The Vilnius moment promises to be extremely important for the European future of the Republic of Moldova. In an interview with the deputy foreign minister Julian Groza, we have sought to find out if the Republic of Moldova is ready to initial the Association Agreement with EU, but also how to ensure the irreversibility of the European course of the Republic of Moldova.

■ **Julian Groza:** The irreversibility of the European course has been confirmed over the last four years. Since 2009 we have demonstrated that we have had a consistent and stable agenda. Despite political crises that we faced, the coalition government has ensured a constant course. We have had negotiations on the Association Agreement which was launched in 2012 and which we have finished recently, including discussions on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. And we have obtained an action plan for the visa liberalization regime. The

first phase of this plan has been successfully accomplished and at present we have advanced considerably with the second phase – we are waiting for the final report of the European Commission on the action plan in November.

So, the things speak for themselves. The Government of the Republic of Moldova is maintaining its European agenda and ensures continuity and sustainability for reforms. Of course, there has been internal and external pressure – this is at least the analysis of many experts. My opinion is that the Republic of Moldova has a deep dialogue with EU, a dialogue which is not only political but also an extended sector dialogue.

For example, in the period of October 1-4, we will practically have a European week in Chisinau. The EU ambassadors that are part of the Political and Security Committee will be in Chisinau. Another group called Military Political Group will also come to Chisinau in the context of the framework agreement that we have with EU in the area of security and defence policy. In addition to that, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Stefan Fule, and the Lithuanian foreign minister will come to participate together with the Moldovan foreign minister Natalia Gherman in the opening session of the Civic Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership from Chisinau. At the end of the week, Moldova will be visited by the Estonian president. All these will happen after the diplomatic season has started with an unprecedented visit of the Benelux ministers in the Republic of Moldova. So, from the point of view of the political dialogue, the things are developing well and speak for themselves.

On the sectorial dimension, we have managed an integration in many areas. For example, the Republic of Moldova

has become part of the European Energy Community. Last year we benefited from this status when the European Commissioner for Energy, Gunther Oettinger, demonstrated the EU solidarity in the discussions of the Republic of Moldova with the Russian Federation in the area of Energy Package III. Another example is signature by the Republic of Moldova of the Agreement on the European Common Air Space where we have already results- the best known low- cost company, Wizz-Air has operated its first flight to Italy. And other sector areas will follow.

Over the last years, we have demonstrated that beyond the political dialogue we have a gradual sectorial integration process into EU. We use all opportunities in order to engage the Republic of Moldova into an irreversible European process. And our final objective is joining EU.

At present, there is consensus among the member-states as to the political association and economic integration of the Republic of Moldova. Or, the Association Agreement, which includes creation of the deep and comprehensive free trade area, aims exactly at achieving this objective. By signing this document, we are realising the political association and economic integration objective. In Vilnius, we are going to initial this agreement and we undertook to sign and ratify it by the present parliament next year. Having signed this document, we will have the provisional application clause, which will mean that when the agreement is signed, the document will enter into effect immediately on certain matters. The latter are established at the moment of signature. Practically, up to 70%-80% of the agreement will enter into force at the moment of signature.

Lina Grău: What is the role of Russia in this picture and what should we do to ensure that the European aspiration of the Republic of Moldova is not barred by certain hostile gestures by Moscow in the economic and energy area. How does Chisinau discuss with Moscow in order to balance these things? How do we need to explain to the Russian partners that this is our option and that we will not change it?

Iulian Groza: This is exactly what we have tried to do. If you remember, the Russian foreign minister has stated after the meeting with Natalia Gherman this summer in Moscow that the Russian Federation does not only recognise but also respects the sovereign option chosen by the Republic of Moldova- the European course.

We see no contradiction in the deepening of our European course and maintaining good relations with the Russian Federation. And I think we can coexist in this sense. At the end of the day, coming closer to the EU is our option and if the Russian Federation says at least officially that it respects it, let it do so in the same manner as we respect the option of other countries like Russia and other states of joining other organisations and cooperation frameworks. For example, there exists Russia-Byelorussia- Kazakhstan Customs Union which wants to extend into a Eurasian Union. This is the option of these countries and let them follow it. If they think that this is the best model for the region, let success attend them.

We are of the opinion that the best option for our country is the European integration, taking into account the fact that we are a European country with European values and we want to have rule of law, justice, and offer investment possibilities, jobs. The Republic of Moldova can achieve all these only with EU. But of course, it can maintain good relations with the other neighbours. There are opportunities which should be developed both in West and Est. The main objective of our country is to transform and ensure that the reforms are sustainable and that we get ready to become part of the European family. Speaking about our option for transformation and modernisation model, we have chosen the EU model because we are convinced it is the best.

An important element which counts in foreign relations is to have not only a well-balanced policy but also a transparent and predictable one. Over the last years, we have proven that the Republic of Moldova does not have parallel foreign policy agenda or double standards. We convey the same messages in Brussels, Berlin and Washington.

Lina Grău: Is Chisinau ready for Vilnius? What stage are the Association and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements at?

Iulian Groza: Our objective is to initial the Association Agreement which will also include the creation of the deed and comprehensive free trade area. It is important to mention this because many times we hear about two different agreements – AA and DCFTA. Actually, from the legal point of view, we will sign one agreement which is the Association Agreement. This includes a separate part dedicated to the deep and comprehensive free trade area. And in Vilnius we are going to initial this agreement so that after the finalisation of all the internal EU procedures and translation of the document, the latter is signed.

Our expectation is to sign it as soon as possible next year, even in spring or summer, within the mandate of the actual European Commission whose mandate is expiring at the end of October 2014. In any case, the idea is to manage to sign and ratify the agreement by the current parliament so as to ensure its applicability and legal irreversibility of the European course of the Republic of Moldova.

As far as visas are concerned, we are implementing the action plan for the visa liberalisation. We have finalised the first stage and we are now at the end of the second phase. We submitted the self-evaluation report of the second phase in September and at present, the Commission is at the phase of the final report preparation. In mid-October, the DG of the Internal Affairs Directorate is coming to Moldova together with an expert team in order to evaluate our achievements within this action plan. Immediately after this visit, at the beginning of November, we expect the European Commission to present its progress report.

Our expectations from Vilnius and immediately after, is that the European Commission comes up with a recommendation to the member states and the EU Council on the amendment of



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the Regulations 5.3.9 of the UE Council stipulating the list of the countries which need and need no visas. Then, an internal legal procedure will start within the Council and the European Parliament. And again, our objective is to manage so as this decision making process happens next year within the actual mandate of the European Commission.

We will ensure by all means a better communication and more active information of the public opinion about the benefits and opportunities of the new agreement in order to get ready for the implementation.

As far as the visa regime is concerned, we should do the same thing – inform the citizens about the benefits and obligations because we are speaking about a regime which should be observed. It is about a free short-term regime. The Moldovan citizens will be able to travel for a 90- day period within half a year and altogether, they will be able to stay abroad six months in a year.

■ **Lina Grâu:** And if things go well, can we hope that we will be able to travel freely in EU by the end of 2014?

■ **Iulian Groza:** This is our objective and a common objective of the Republic of Moldova and the EU. This way, we will be practically able to ensure the achievement of the objectives established in 2009 when the Eastern Partnership was launched and the EU-Moldova dialogue was re-launched.

■ **Lina Grâu:** In Chisinau they speak a lot about the Vilnius moment. Some western diplomat was drawing the attention some weeks ago to the fact that “there is also life after Vilnius”. Is Chisinau aware of the fact that after Vilnius it will have to make even a bigger effort to implement the documents adopted with the European Union?

■ **Iulian Groza:** Of course, Vilnius has become a symbolic moment in the perception of the public opinion and politicians from the Republic of Moldova. In general, in our dialogue with EU and within

the EaP, everybody set objectives for this summit. It is because the EaP summit takes place every two years and it is an occasion to re-evaluate the relations, the framework, the objectives, the opportunities and to set new objectives. From this point of view, the Vilnius summit is of course, very important. When we initial the AA, we will have signals regarding the visa regime. On one hand, it is a symbolic moment, and on the other hand, it fixes the finalisation of a stage.

After Vilnius, from the point of view of the EaP, at the end of 2015, there will be another summit in Riga. In this sense, our objective is to achieve what we have established for Vilnius and set new objectives for the Riga summit.

We know already some of these objectives – to sign the AA and put it into practice; to have a visa free regime and to get our country ready for a new stage in the relations with EU. And the Riga summit could offer that opportunity.

Editorial

Victor Chirilă

Vlad Filat, the chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM) has announced recently he would launch an action for society consolidation around the European integration idea. Filat's initiative, though a recent one, is not new. The transformation of the European integration idea into a national and unifying idea has been discussed time and again over the last decade. Each time, though, a great ideal was disguised into a party electoral crock. And we are now risking having the same result.



European Integration – national idea or electoral crock?

It is evident for everybody that as Moldova gets closer to the moment of initialling and later of signing the Association Agreement with EU, the external and internal pressure is becoming more intense and threatening. Russia is boycotting our wines and is threatening with new commercial taxes, revision of bilateral agreements and aggravation of the political dialogue with the separatist administration from Tiraspol. The communist party which as recently as yesterday was pro-European and now pro- Eurasian, has initiated the so-called “velvet revolution” of complete disparagement of the main state institutions, thus deepening even more the atmosphere of uncertainty, despair and tiredness in the society. Tiraspol is promising Russia through Nina Stanski to sacrifice Gagauzia and Balti on the altar of the Eurasian integration. The lawmakers from Comrat are requesting “the inclusion” of Gagauzia in the negotiations process for Transnistrian settlement. In other words, they want no less than federalisation of the Republic of Moldova. And it is very easy to guess who stands behind these provocations – it goes without saying- Russia.

Can we cope with these provocations attempting at our sovereignty of choosing our destiny? Of course, we can. An adequate answer of those who is opting for a democratic, prosperous and European country should be the solidarity around the idea of Moldova's European integration. Such an ideal aiming at consolidating a society which is divided and off the beam should be above the vanity, egoism and political competitiveness, ideology, party programme or electoral platform. It should be a common good and not in the least the ownership of a single party or of an egoistic political leader. If not, a noble and illuminating idea will be profaned and compromised for ever.

I have no intention to affront anybody but like many others in the society, I think that at present, no party or politician in the country can be a credible and absolute national leader able to unify alone our society around the ideal of European integration and of joining the EU. Who tries to do it alone is either naïve,

blind or drunk with own ambitions of becoming the sole unifier/ saviour of Moldovans.

Unfortunately, we have to recognize that the pro-European parties who have been governing the country for the last four years have seriously compromised themselves. There is a bitter disappointment in the society as to their performance. According to the last opinion poll, 80% of our citizens think the things in the Republic of Moldova move to a wrong direction. Why? Because too many promises have been just words. We have been promised a prosperous Moldova without poverty, communists, Voronin and a justice free of corruption, an economy free of monopolies, transparency in decision-making etc. And what are we having now? We have Voronin and his party which is growing in popularity according to official and unofficial opinion polls.

Taking into account this sad reality, it is unlikely that the launching of the idea of unity around the national objective of European integration and of joining of EU by the pro-European parties will manage to mobilise the society and its support. On the contrary, the initiative risks to be interpreted as an attempt to exploit the idea of national unity as an electoral crock, thus emphasising our contempt, distaste and lack of confidence in them and our leaders. What is to be done?

In order to avoid the suspicions and poisonous interpretations, it would be moral and rational that the idea of national unity around the European integration idea and of joining the EU be launched by a group of “wise people”, apolitical and public personalities from various domains who enjoy the respect and confidence of most society. These should be symbol people, honest people and people who build through their activity Moldova's fame as a civilised nation with secular traditions, enrich our cultural patrimony and contribute to our establishment as a democratic and European state. Only this way the idea of national unity can be successful, dear politicians-European and Eurasian, democratic and less democratic, but all having the same sins.

Klaudijus Maniokas: Signature of Association Agreements between EU and Moldova and Ukraine is a geopolitical issue. Neither before nor after Vilnius will Russia renounce the pressure

Since the Vilnius summit is a hot issue, I asked the opinion of the Lithuanian expert on the processes of the Republic of Moldova and the European perspective of the region. Klaudijus Maniokas, director of the executive board of the Vilnius Association for Evaluation and Consultancy in the area of European legal, economic and social policies (ESTEP Lithuania), says that if in the case of Ukraine, the signature of the Association Agreement with EU at the Vilnius summit in November has been politically conditioned, including by a decision regarding the ex-prime minister Iulia Timoshenko, the Republic of Moldova has always been regarded as a leader in the Eastern Partnership group and as an example of political will, speed of movement and technical readiness for the implementation of agreements with EU.

I've asked the Lithuanian expert how the Moldovan authorities should act on one hand, and the European Union, on the other, so as after the Vilnius summit Chisinau continues its accelerated European course without coming back under the Eastern influence.



■ **Klaudijus Maniokas:** After the summit which will mean an important success for the Republic of Moldova, through initialling of the Association Agreement with EU, the life will not stop. The agreement provisions will have to be implemented and Moldova will advance even more towards EU. It is evident now, several months before the summit, more than half a year ago, that the issue is a geopolitical one and together with initialling of the AA this geopolitical fight will not stop. It will not be just a technical process of fulfilling the agreement. It will be a battle in which Russia will get involved with various pressure mechanisms.

The developments after the summit will depend very much on how this fight will develop and how strong the Eastern European governments are, especially the governments of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Everything depends on how autonomous these governments will be and how decisive they will be in implementing the commitments with EU and continuing the European course.

This will of course, depend also on the European Union and the way it will impose itself as an ally of these states and the support it will provide- not just technical but also political.

■ **Lina Grâu:** The Baltic states have also passed through an episode in which after the breakdown of the USSR, the Russian Federation exercised serious economic and political pressure in order to keep them under its sphere of influence. Now, before the Vilnius summit, Russia seems to act according to the same scenario, putting economic pressure on Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. How far can the Russian pressure go and do you think

Russia will ever accept or reconcile to the idea that Chisinau chose the European course and thus ease its pressure?

■ **Klaudijus Maniokas:** Unfortunately, I do not think we can expect a rapid "ceasefire" agreement. It seems that the Eurasian Union has become for Russia and its leaders a foreign policy key-point and that it is not likely that it can be stopped by the first obstacle.

Of course, we can see here also positive aspects if it is to judge by the Lithuanian experience. All the crises in the relationship with Russia- starting with the '90es and especially in 1998-1999, when after the Russian crisis the economy stagnated and was even in decline – a reorientation of the economy, investments and trade towards EU happened. I am convinced that had it not been for this crisis, such an orientation

would have been lengthier and more difficult. What is really important is the fact that the European Union has also contributed to this reorientation.

Or this reorientation is not an easy thing – there is need for investments in laws and standards and especially in relations with investors and European partners. EU needs to put the emphasis on backing its technical support with political and economic assistance. The assistance in attracting investments from EU countries is especially important.

The European Union can offer such assistance – a thing which has been demonstrated by other crises in the region. After the Russian aggression in Georgia from 2008, EU has mobilised and provided this country a substantial political, economic and financial support. Thus, an adverse effect to Russia's wish was obtained – that is an acceleration of the European processes which can happen also in the Republic of Moldova.

Lina Grâu: How did Lithuania succeed in diminishing the energy dependence on the Russian Federation and keep this political pressure mechanism that Russia uses in relations with its neighbours under control?

Klaudijus Maniokas: Neither today have we been able to get totally rid of the Russian energy dependence. Paradoxically enough, our energy dependence has become more vulnerable after joining EU, because we had to close down the second block of the nuclear power plant in the country, which was the main source of electric power in Lithuania. At present, we depend very much on the gas and electric power of Russia. We do, of course, have alternative energy sources – biomass, solar and wind energy- but these do not cover our needs. So, the energy dependence is a hot current issue in Lithuania.

At present, a condensed gas terminal is being under construction in Klaipėda, which will become operational at the end of the next year, becoming an important instrument in ensuring energy security after the closing-down of the nuclear power plant. Additionally, electric lines which will interconnect Lithuania with Sweden and Poland will become operational at the beginning of 2015.

So, we have not solved the problem of energy dependency on Russia and are still working on that. Our experience can show how important this is and how difficult is to solve this issue for a country in the Russian active sphere of influence. It is especially difficult when the political process is fragmented and when there are many different influences and the political cycle is rather short. All these energy security projects are long-term and there is need for an important political, economic and financial mobilisation.

In spite of this, we keep this dependency of ours under control, which means we do not have situations that Russia comes and threatens us with gas supply shut-down. The fact that Lithuania is a EU member is very important. In addition to that, the Kaliningrad region is supplied with gas through our country. Everybody understands that Lithuania has also an important influence mechanism in case of energy threats by Russia.

Lina Grâu: How important a mechanism for Russia is the Transnistrian conflict in maintaining the influence on Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova?

Klaudijus Maniokas: To my understanding, this problem has been indeed created as an instrument of controlling the destiny of the Republic of Moldova. And Russia is doing its best to preserve the status-quo. As far as I know, EU got involved in the solution of this problem and I think that if there is political will, energy and resources coming not only from the Republic of Moldova but also from EU, the problem will be solved. Of course, this is not going to be easy, but if Chisinau maintains its European course, and as it comes closer in this process, a solution to this problem will be found.

I am saying this based on our experience with the Kaliningrad enclave, even though the two situations are not comparable. So, if there is will and resources, and especially if Moldova is recognised as a country with European perspective, then a solution will be found.

Lina Grâu: Does the Russian Eurasian Union project have the potential of becoming an important competitor to EU in the post-soviet space?

Klaudijus Maniokas: We cannot say the project lacks attractiveness for everybody. It is also evident that many economic sectors of the ex-soviet countries will find it impossible to face the competitiveness of the European markets. For these countries it will be very important to have access to the Russian market or to the markets of the neighbouring countries. At the same time, the political and economic costs of this access are very high.

I think it is very good to consider the perspective of reorienting towards the western markets which will of course have its costs but which is an important investment in the future.

In conclusion, I can say that the Customs Union will have certain short-term advantages but they cannot be compared with the medium and long term perspectives that EU offers.

Lina Grâu: The year 2014 is an electoral year for the Republic of Moldova. Next autumn, Moldova will have parliamentary elections. How do you think should the ruling parties act in order not to compromise the European course of the Republic of Moldova?

Klaudijus Maniokas: The political fight is everywhere an intense process and as far as I understand, both the democratic parties and the communists from the Republic of Moldova need EU. The motivation could be different though it is evident that all the political forces need the European Union. I think the democratic parties see this as a future for the Republic of Moldova, while the others, like the actual Ukrainian government, see the European Union as a counterbalance for Russia, a counterbalance which is needed anyway. My opinion is that the European course of the Republic of Moldova will not be dramatically threatened. But of course, from the tactical point of view, this will be fundamentally different if the communists come to power.

My advice for the democratic parties is to better monitor the opinions in the society and ensure a better visibility of the European projects and assistance. By and large, I do not think that the Republic of Moldova will ever come back to the existential decision regarding its strategic vector.