



## External Factor and Anticipated Parliamentary Elections of July 29, 2009

*\*Radio-broadcasting program realized by the Foreign Policy Association in cooperation with the Imedia Agency and with the assistance of the German Foundation "Friedrich Ebert Stiftung" (FES). 05.07.2009.*

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**Corneliu RUSNAC, Imedia:** Good day, dear listeners. I am Corneliu Rusnac and I would like to welcome you at another cycle of programs dedicated to foreign policy issues, carried out with the support of the Foreign Policy Association and financial assistance of Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Today we will discuss the issue of external factor and repeated Parliamentary elections of July 29. We would like to welcome the political analysts Vlad Lupan, Victor Chirila and Radu Vrabie in our studio. Mr. Lupan is an independent expert, and Victor Chirila and Radu Vrabie are experts of the Foreign Policy Association. Good day and welcome to our program.

I would like to start our discussion with the recent visit of the incumbent President Vladimir Voronin, who is also leader of the Party of Communists (PCRM), to the Russian Federation. Following this visit of June 22, 2009, Moscow authorities expressed their eagerness to provide a 500 million dollar loan to the Republic of Moldova. Several experts and politicians from the opposition have, nevertheless, asserted this gesture of Russia as an electoral support for PCRM. Moreover, they have showed their skepticism regarding the fact that Russia would provide this loan integrally under the conditions when Russia itself is confronted with a serious economic crisis. Thus, the question is how this gesture of Moscow can be interpreted. Mr. Lupan, what is your opinion about this?

### 1. **The electoral connotation of Vladimir Voronin's visit in Moscow, on June 22, 2009**

**Vlad LUPAN, Independent Expert:** It is indeed true and here I would agree with the representatives of the opposition parties. In point of fact, it is an electoral visit similar, by the way, to other visits of President Voronin to Moscow or Kremlin representatives in Chisinau. The very manner of the visit proves that it bears an electoral character. Promises have been made that can not be fulfilled in the nearest future. This clearly shows that the visit was used for what the West calls picture-taking opportunities, opportunities of mass media coverage so that it can be disseminated further on, including through channels that are extremely popular in the Republic of Moldova. It is meant to create an image of the Party of Communists, the only party enjoying the support of the Russian Federation, which is critical for the voters from the Republic of Moldova in the light of July 29, 2009 repeated elections, and also to create the impression that Russian Federation will financially support the Republic of Moldova, although such an assistance might come either too late or eventually might not come at all.



**Corneliu RUSNAC:** Mr. Chirila, what do you think about this?

**Victor CHIRILĂ, Interim Executive Director of Foreign Policy Association (APE):** I believe that the recent visit of President Voronin to Moscow, in fact, confirms that the Eastern vector of our foreign policy is prevailing more and more. It is true that this visit is connected to the electoral context. The Party of Communists much relies on the fact that Russian Federation will help it win the power for the subsequent four years. Besides, this visit, but even more so the messages coming from Moscow following this visit, shows that Russian Federation knows how to play an important role in this region, in our country, whilst its dearest hope is to prevent extension of the western world towards Moldova and Eastern European countries that belong to the Eastern Partnership launched recently by the European Union.

**Corneliu RUSNAC:** What do you think, Mr. Vrabie?

**Radu VRABIE, Program Coordinator, Foreign Policy Association:** I believe that in addition to what my colleagues said there is another aspect that will be used by Russian Federation as well. Because look what happens – International Monetary Fund did not provide a credit to Moldova in the situation when Moldova did not have a full-fledged Government. Given that the image of Russia in the eyes of the Republic of Moldova population will enhance because there is an expression rather often used by the authorities from Chisinau which sounds like this „friends in need are friends indeed”, meaning that regardless of the current situation Russia did agree to provide this money. And I think for Russia this visit represents a PR action as well.

**Victor CHIRILĂ:** If it gets confirmed that the Republic of Moldova much relies on receiving this half-a-billion-dollar financial assistance and if the Republic of Moldova enters into negotiations with Russia, I am afraid it can damage our relations with the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the United States of America, and, of course, the European Union.

Again, we see a very clear difference between our relations with the West and with the Russian Federation. While our negotiations with the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank are transparent, and the conditions set forth by our Western partners or stakeholders in order to benefit from their assistance are well known, in case of the Russian Federation we know nothing about these conditions, which gives rise to a lot of suspicion and question marks here, in Chisinau, on the part of the opposition parties and civil society stakeholders. Wouldn't it be natural to ask ourselves of the true conditions of this aid, as well as what Russian Federation expects to get from that? Because the most recent past along with the more remote one proves that the Russian Federation puts a lot of emphasis on conditions of political nature meant to undermine our sovereignty, namely the sovereignty so much valued and pushed upon by the Party of Communists in this campaign. Or rather, if this party truly sticks to the notions of sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova then it should inform us in a transparent and open manner about the outcome of the discussions held in this regard.

**Vlad LUPAN:** To what extent does the Party of Communists de facto enforce the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova? Actually, this is a question that nowadays has to be asked by us, including by the listeners of this radio program as well. What does this trip to Moscow mean and what shall the Party of



Communist give in exchange for this political support? What does the President Voronin count on when he goes to Moscow and who should pay for this? The ordinary citizen or the leader of the Party of Communists? I have doubts that the leader of the Party of Communists will pay for something at any point of time. On the contrary, for sure we will have to pay for this.

**Victor CHIRILĂ:** Of course, here we speak about future generations. Who will pay off this credit? Let us not forget that discussions have already started with the United States of America with the view of providing an aid to the Republic of Moldova within the Millennium Challenge Program. In case the agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the United States of America is signed, this aid might reach a total value of 300 million dollars. And this is not a credit. These are donations, money for projects, a gift, money to build our roads, money to modernize the agriculture, money to rehabilitate our irrigation system that practically does not exist in our country. However, to benefit from this non-reimbursable assistance, the Republic of Moldova should uphold certain conditions. And here, the first condition set forth by the American Government for beneficiary countries is the following: democracy and good governance, because an evident worsening of the situation have been noticed in these two areas during the last months, particularly after the Parliamentary elections of April 5th. In this relation, there are numerous concerns expresses by several international forums. Therefore, the hope formulated by Mr. Voronin in his interview given to Voice of America radio station last week is false as long as these negative evolutions are not removed.

## 2. Why does the Russian Federation support the Party of Communists?

**Corneliu RUSNAC:** However, why would the Russian Federation be interested to support the Party of Communists and not other parties? Why does it manifest a face-value support for this very party?

**Vlad LUPAN:** Mere cold judgment. Russian Federation has always been cold in its reckoning, being well-known in this regard. Besides, even if the Party of Communists does not totally suit Russia since it considers President Voronin a traitor of 2003 Kozak Memorandum and, respectively, a person who can not be trusted, political judgment tells it that the respective party, for instance, will win the elections from Moldova with a high percentage. And then, as they also stated before the 5th of April elections, Russia counts on lesser evil.

Let us imagine a situation when Russian Federation might decide to support other parties. This will mean that Russian Federation supports the parties that want, first and foremost, democratization of the Republic of Moldova. Democratization of the Republic of Moldova means, however, setting up of some European rules in Moldova and not some Russian-type rules, like for instance: "I do what I want and then get free unharmed and without any problems". If this happens, Russian Federation would, in fact, support the Europeanization and implicitly Moldova's withdrawal from Russia's sphere of influence, although it has already been directly mentioned as its zone of influence. However, in this case Russian Federation would back up some parties, which have chosen a formula that does not suit the Russians from geopolitical point of view. And here we do not speak of politics. It is not about the Party of Communists. Not at all, it is about orientation. It is about the following. There are two spaces on the European continent today and namely:



- Euro-Asiatic space and here the emphasis is on Asiatic. It is a space with approximate rules: “Today I want it this way and tomorrow I want it another way. Today it is good just like I said, but tomorrow it is already not. I change the rules and I am also the one to say whether it is good or bad. That means, I do what I want to and, respectively, I am also the one to tell right from wrong and do justice”;
- European space where rules are rules, justice is justice, economy is economy, prosperity is not a myth and we see it.

Thus, one is the European Union, i.e. “European civilization” space and two – “Euro-Asiatic civilization” space where civilization is, in fact, also somehow approximate.

It is absolutely clear that Russian Federation would support only those political parties from the Republic of Moldova who would have a higher chance of success in the Parliament, but should these parties be positioned more towards the Euro-Asiatic civilization space, it would be even better. For the Republic of Moldova’s case, it is exactly the situation with the PCRM. It is a non-European party that, in essence, is oriented towards the Euro Asiatic civilization space.

However, if one or several democratic parties win the elections, Russian Federation will then start to work with them as well. Since the issue is about the pragmatism of the Russian Federation and its future interests. And this thing should be understood not only by the population of the Republic of Moldova, but also by the political parties, the Party of Communists and democratic parties inclusively.

As Russian Federation does not go anyway, so does the Republic of Moldova. When I say ‘does not go anyway’, I mean it will not disappear from the global map as the Party of Communists claims it will. No, it will not. Republic of Moldova will continue to exist and, at the end of the day, in international relations one needs to work with what he has.

**Victor CHIRILĂ:** On top of that, I believe that the Party of Communists has monopolized the support of the Russian federation not because of Russia’s affection for President Voronin. I am sure there is a lot of distrust in President Voronin. And the past proves this once again. The affront brought about by Mr. Voronin back in 2003 towards Mr. Putin can not be so easily forgotten and I do not believe it will be forgotten so quickly either. But, on the other side, Russian Federation does not have any other force in Moldova to rely on in order to preserve its influence both in Moldova and Transnistria by either postponing the settlement of Transnistrian conflict by finding a solution that will be advantageous for Russia. Therefore, nowadays Moscow much counts on the Party of Communists. It first of all relies on the fact that this party denotes a behavior far from European practices and standards...

As a matter of fact, persistence on this line is a factor of instability in our country. As long as the Party of Communists does not understand one thing that stability in this country can only be secured through dialogue with the civil society and the opposition and that building stability does not necessarily mean destroying the others but rather conversing with your partners, with your opponents, it will still remain a factor of instability. However, instability is the first element that works to the benefit of the Russian Federation as instability creates necessary



conditions to preserve the current status quo in Moldova and the Transnistrian region. As long as this instability and status quo is maintained, Russian Federation will remain an important actor in our domestic life here in Chisinau.

**Radu VRABIE:** Apart from this fact, I believe that the Party of Communists is the most vulnerable as well because it has been leading the country for 8 years and by now should have shown some results. By and large, it does not have other allies so far as it has developed bad relations with Romania, it failed to fulfill its obligations before the Council of Union, it does not have brilliant relations with Ukraine, and this thing was understood by Russia. It was sensed by Russia ever since the aforementioned Kozak Memorandum when it started to pursue a strategy whereby it initially rejected the Republic of Moldova, a country initially declared as unfriendly to Russia and put under a Russian propagandistic campaign, and then, step by step, it started to give various gifts to Moldova, in particular, to President Voronin and make various promises. In this context, being in great need for friends the Party of Communists has entered this race, and now even if it wants it cannot get out of it because Russia was more skillful in playing the game. Besides, Moldova was not transparent in its game. A thing which is, by the way, mentioned by many foreign partners is namely that - Moldova is not transparent, it engages in mysteriously veiled negotiations with the Russian Federation and it acts like this not only with respect to its European partners but also to its own citizens. Under such conditions, we cannot but guess what stands behind the understandings Voronin-Medvedev or Voronin-Putin.

A lot of questions appear in these circumstances and should the government, the authorities be transparent, they would eventually be able to answer all these questions to their advantage. However, as long as such a dialogue is absent and we have the results we have, we come to realize that Russian influence is very grand indeed and it probably continues to grow.

### 3. The Transnistrian issue and the election campaign

**Corneliu RUSNAC:** I would like us to go back to the question of Transnistria that was touched upon earlier by Mr. Chirila. We have noticed that during this election campaign the Transnistrian subject seems to be less exploited by the political parties than in the past. How do you explain this shift?

**Radu VRABIE:** Before the 5th of April poll we were invited to a program with Mr. Lupan to discuss the electoral platforms and the place of Transnistria in them. And it was then that I realized that its role is not so big irrespective of the fact that Transnistrian issue is one of the ten priorities inquired in the public opinion polls. Nevertheless, the situation has changed by now. In an interview given to a Russia radio station President Voronin himself has acknowledged that he does not have sufficient time to settle the Transnistrian problem, as there are too many other concerns now. However, if we refer to the 29th of July election campaign, I for myself have noticed two political parties that are more active. Apart from the governing party and the Democratic Party, the others are not so active in terms of their slogans, electoral publicity billboards, and appearance on TV. We can see that even the Party of Communists has changed its strategy. It has shifted from the slogan "For a stable Moldova" to "Let's defend our Motherland". I assume they have chosen this path of radicalization in which there is no longer a place for



Transnistria. Bringing the issue of Transnistria back into the discussion will not be to the advantage of the Party of Communists and this also explains the non-inclusion of Transnistrian conflict in the electoral platform.

**Victor CHIRILĂ:** My colleague, Radu Vrabie, is right with regard to the message “Let’s defend our Motherland!”. The question is whom shall we defend our Motherland from? From Romania? From the opposition parties that are suspected to have channeled their efforts against the independence and sovereignty of our country? Should we decide to talk about Transnistria, it would mean to talk about the danger coming from the East, from the Russian Federation as in fact we still have those combat troops stationed on our territory. We still have these 20 tons of munitions that has not been transported to the Russian Federation yet. In other words, these are subjects that are not convenient to be discussed today because the official Chisinau needs the support of the Russian Federation during the election campaign.

**Vlad LUPAN:** In the opinion of the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, the Transnistrian conflict is indeed an issue they do not want to discuss at all. But there are a number of connotations and parallels linked to the Transnistrian talks and inclusion of this topic in this election campaign and we have to focus our attention on them.

We have noticed that before April 5th, this subject was seriously used in the election campaign with different purposes, including for the purpose of inciting the Russian Federation to take part in the electoral campaign on the side of the Party of Communists. Now the issue of Transnistrian conflict is not so critical for the PCRM because it managed to convince Moscow that they are the ones to ask for the support of Kremlin. Thus, the Transnistrian leverage over the Moldovan authorities used by Moscow has stopped being so relevant now since we speak about elections and during elections it is sufficient just to give your support to the Party of Communists since it is already crystal clear that this party has proven its loyalty towards Moscow and the recent visit of the Moldovan President to Moscow is another proof of that.

On the other side, the Transnistrian issue is not used by the opposition parties. Why? Because in reality, this subject was used in a propagandistic and disproportional manner by the Party of Communists, namely to the disadvantage of the national interests of the Republic of Moldova but to the benefit of its electoral gains. Thus, first of all, the Transnistrian issue is not an issue of priority for the citizens of Moldova. Besides, starting up the discussion on Transnistrian topic and putting it on top of the agenda means to support the Russian Federation efforts in using this conflict as leverage to influence the Republic of Moldova. Because, in reality, the settlement of Transnistrian conflict will not happen soon. Thus, as long as you know that settlement of Transnistrian conflict will not come so quickly and anyway you start discussing this subject, it actually means agreeing to play the game orchestrated by the Russian Federation. And then it becomes obvious that the opposition parties, be that liberal or democratic, should not use this subject in the election campaign of the 29th of July, but depending on the results to start discussing it already after the elections.

There is something else to add here. I have alluded to a parallel. Let us see what the Party of Communists does. It does exactly what the Tiraspol leader, Smirnov, keeps doing. Well, the Tiraspol leader, Smirnov, creates hysteria “in the state”, in its self-declared state of Transnistria and immediately afterwards he says: all of you, together, should join me in our struggle against the fascist, Romanian threat, and on he goes; because they want to destroy



our “statehood”. Don’t we see a similar thing appearing now in the discourse launched by the Party of Communists? They make an exact copy of the behavior of Tiraspol leader, create hysteria in the state about an eventual danger for disappearance of the country’s statehood and then say: join us to defend our statehood that, in fact, is not attacked by anybody. In my opinion, it is pure propaganda; a thing that should be better analyzed and understood at its face value.

**Radu VRABIE:** I have a slightly different opinion with regard to the perspective of the opposition parties. It is true that in the opinion of the PCRM, the opposition parties need a short-term victory, whereas the Transnistrian conflict does not belong to such a victory and can not be incorporated in their electoral strategy. At the same time, the Party of Communists, in my opinion, is very vulnerable because it can not boast with accomplishments. Thereby, the opposition parties might take advantage of this situation and start speculations thereon.

**Vlad LUPAN:** I would like to put it like this. What added value have we seen, in my opinion, or what gains have become visible lately in the activity of the communist governance? An economic crisis is coming; a large part of our citizens are already abroad; educational system is not the most advanced in Europe, nor is it in the closest neighborhood either; relations with EU, an organization so much preferred by the majority of the Moldovan citizens, are almost on the ground. Thus, when there is almost nothing to report about, you have to distract the attention and try to find external enemies, and here you are – Romania, an external, extraordinary congenial enemy. Thus, you hence attract Russia on your side which is afraid that Romania will do something, nobody knows what, in the Republic of Moldova. And, on the other side, you manage to also consolidate the society around you. This is what I have mentioned a bit earlier: make best use of all possible propaganda tools that have nothing in common with the reality.

#### 4. The negative impact of the election campaign on the quality of Moldovan Foreign Policy

**Victor CHIRILĂ:** In fact, we should recognize that the previous and current election campaign has produced a negative impact over our foreign policy. Actually, we have come to witness a deterioration of our foreign policy messages. And we see that by now our relations with Brussels have grown cold. We have got a signal that Brussels would be ready to start negotiating the signing of a future association agreement with the Republic of Moldova, but it sets up some clear-cut conditions: to provide equal treatment to all EU citizens, meaning to refuse from visa regime introduced for the Romanian citizens recently; to ensure enforcement of human rights and carry out a transparent, efficient and effective investigation of the sad events of April that ended up in flagrant human rights violations, as well as to organize and hold a correct and fair election campaign in compliance with democratic principles and standards. Only once these conditions are met, the relations with Brussels will be renewed. However, so far, the official Chisinau, the Party of Communists is not yet ready to make these steps to meet Brussels conditions because for them power counts most of all, power seems to be craved by them at any price and it is also reflected on the quality of our foreign policy.

**Corneliu RUSNAC:** What risks might arise for the Republic of Moldova from deterioration of the relations with the European partners, with the European Union, with the United States?



**Vlad LUPAN:** I would mention here the international monetary organizations, which have direct relations with both the European Union and the United States. Deterioration of the relations in this aspect might entail a delay in signing of some agreements. But signing of agreements does not mean just signing of some papers. It means a very concrete thing. The agreement is not signed as long as the country does not meet some conditions, as mentioned by Mr. Chirila a bit earlier. Thus, there will be no reforms, and nor will there be relations with the European Union. But if there is no relation with the European Union, there wouldn't be normal ties with the International Monetary Fund, nor with the World Bank. Consequently, the Republic of Moldova will not benefit from any financial support namely during this time of crisis, meaning no funding will come from international monetary institutions and major western partners of the Republic of Moldova, such as the European Union and the United States.

Thus, the level of future economic relations will, in fact, depend on implementation of some real reforms in Moldova within a very short period of time, as well as compliance with certain conditions on the procedure of holding of parliamentary elections... and the reaction is already quite visible. Let's recall what the International Monetary Fund said that until we see the election results, or better to say, not election results per say but the way these elections will be held in the Republic of Moldova, we can not speak of any funding.

I am very sorry that I have to say this in front of our listeners, but the Russian Federation does not have spare money to give to Moldova. It looks very nice on paper, but the real money is with the International Monetary Fund. And if money does not come from this institution, we will then have to deal with a real slump. As for the money from Russia... Personally I have serious doubts about when and how much money will come from the Russian Federation, since Russia itself has to withstand this crisis... Therefore, the present authorities from Moldova should think twice before deciding if it is worthwhile to place the party interests before the interests of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova for the sake of such a short "election-driven" period of time.

**Radu VRABIE:** Several times in his interviews, the incumbent President, Vladimir Voronin, mentioned that Moldova is a unique country, which can have good relations with both the East and the West. A thing that, in principle, is easier said than done. The Republic of Moldova is too small a country to afford the luxury of closing some gates it has just recently managed to penetrate. Since even if it were not about some paper but real money, the conditions of the Russian credit would have been different if the Republic of Moldova had developed good relations with the European Union; whereas conditions instantly change when Russians come to understand that if Moldova does not accept the conditions imposed by Russia, it, in fact, does not have other solutions. Therefore, I once again come to the issue of lack of transparency that the Moldovan authorities have managed to show totally lacking. First of all, for us it is not convenient to negotiate with Russia without the backing of other partners, because at this moment the Republic of Moldova has practically entered a zone where it is not the one that controls its decisions...

**Victor CHIRILĂ:** Foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova has turned into a form of blackmailing. Look at the messages and actions carried out by the present officials towards the European Union: visa regime with Romania will remain effective until EU introduces a visa-free regime for RM citizens. This is a pure blackmail, isn't it? Such messages are not accepted by Brussels. Such blackmailing does not enhance your image and credibility. Credibility is improved through concrete reforms and actions undertaken here in our country aimed at: improving





democratic conditions, modernizing the economy, strengthening border management, enhancing border and customs services in such a way as to be allowed to benefit from the aforementioned visa-free regime with EU etc.

With respect to the International Monetary Fund, Voronin's declarations are speaking for themselves. "Monetary Fund has left, as an unfaithful wife leaving her husband", he said. But, let us ask ourselves, what is the Republic of Moldova in comparison with the IMF? Let us not forget that decisions of the International Monetary Fund are not taken by some functionaries, some international bureaucrats working there. These IMF decisions are made by the developed countries such as Germany, France, European Union, in general, the United States of America... Thus, this affront is not channeled on the International Monetary Fund only; it is addressed against concrete politicians, concrete capitals and concrete states. May be this thing is not understood by those from Chisinau, but things are presented namely in this way.

Or, let us look at this announcement stating that the Russian Federation is ready to give us 500 million dollars ... Isn't it also an affront against the West? Evidently, it is blackmail. During the previous years, Mr. Voronin used to declare that the Republic of Moldova is a small country and therefore: "we will be in those places where our economic and political interests will be". The question then is – where are our economic and political interests? Are they only in Moscow? I believe we face a total collapse of our foreign policy.

**Corneliu RUSNAC:** Mr. Chirilă, Mr. Lupan, Mr. Vrabie, I would like to thank you very much for your participation in this radio program.

Dear listeners, I would like to remind you once again that you have listened to the first broadcast from a cycle of programs devoted to foreign policy issues carried out with the support of the Foreign Policy Association and funded by Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

I, Corneliu Rusnac, program producer, would like to say good-bye to you and looking forward to hearing from you next week.