

Foreign Policy Association together with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung offer you a newsletter on foreign policy and European integration issues of the Republic of Moldova. The newsletter is part of the "Foreign Policy Dialogue" joint project.

# NEWSLETTER

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## Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

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### News in Brief



On June 22, 2018, the UN General Assembly approved the draft resolution on "Complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova". The document, which de facto aims to withdraw the Russian troops from the Transnistrian region, was supported by a majority of 64 votes. 15 states voted against, including Belarus and Armenia, but also Syria, while 83 states abstained. Canada, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Czech Republic, Romania, Ukraine, Georgia, Poland, and the United Kingdom were among the co-authors. Russia has vehemently opposed, insisting even on the withdrawal of the resolution from the agenda, but its proposal was not backed by the UN member states. In a speech at the United Nations, the Moldovan Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Tudor Ulianovschi, said the resolution is centered on the Operational Group of Russian Forces which are still stationing illegally on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, not on the peacekeeping mission.



The new Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to Washington, Cristina Balan, presented on 23 June the letters of accreditation to the President of the United States, Donald Trump. During the official ceremony at the White House, Cristina Balan mentioned the importance of the Moldova-US Strategic Dialogue for the relations between the two states, as well as the US support for regional stability and security. President Donald Trump welcomed the friendly relations between the Republic of Moldova and the United States, and reiterated the US willingness to continue to provide our country with assistance in implementing the reforms aimed at European integration and settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. The following day, the White House announced about the appointment of a new Ambassador to Chisinau. It's about Derek J. Hogan, a career diplomat with more than 20 years of experience. Since 2017 he has been Deputy Executive Secretary of the State Department, an expert for Eastern Europe. Hogan speaks Russian and Spanish.



The EU is examining the increase in export quotas for the Moldovan economic operators, said the European Trade Commissioner, Cecilia Malmström, at a meeting with Tudor Ulianovschi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. In this context, Cecilia Malmström stressed the need to align the national trade legislation amendments to the requirements and principles of the world trade system as laid down by the WTO, thereby reinforcing trade liberalization and implementing the best performing food security policies. The officials have addressed also the issue of sanitary and phytosanitary reform, and the issuance of SPS certificates to the economic agents intending to expand their exports to the EU countries. Mr Tudor Ulianovschi also advocated for the increase in export quotas on the EU market of certain agricultural products, namely apples, grapes and various animal products. At the end, Cecilia Malmström invited the Republic of Moldova to participate in October, in Brussels, together with Georgia and Ukraine, at the meeting of the Free Trade Area.

## Security of the Republic of Moldova: concrete challenges, theoretical solutions?

Sorina Ștefârță

June 2018 proved to be hot for the Republic of Moldova in both senses of the word. The heat passed into torrential rain that destroyed hundreds of hectares of agricultural crops. As to the political heat, it seems not to have still reached its peak.

Chisinau is again gripped by protests. Chisinau is becoming again a story, one less successful this time. On the contrary, it is as if it was brought out of the Grimm brothers' grim pages ... And we are being bombed with «worries and concerns» from the highest level - both in Brussels and Washington. And we are reminded, as diplomatically as possible, about the fact that democracy is sacred and that the elections are the ultimate manifestation of this value. This is as a result of the invalidation of the mayoral elections in Chisinau. Because of the Facebook-that is, because on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, during the second round of elections, the candidate of the «Dignity and Truth» Platform, who won



the elections, called on the citizens in a Facebook live to vote.

The fact that the internet can influence our electoral option has already become an evidence. The fact that the Internet can tilt the scales for entire nations has not been proven yet by the United States, neither France nor Britain, although in all these countries there is, as the lawyers say, «a reasonable suspicion» in the given sense. It is true that in Moldova there is also a «reasonable suspicion», but in our case it refers to the magistrates. For a simple reason- the total lack of confidence of people

in their independence and, therefore, in the impartiality of justice. And not just in terms of number of views. What does the above-mentioned story have in common with the current edition of the newsletter? People's mistrust that in courts- whatever they may be- justice is done in accordance with the law, not with the thickness of the wallet of one of the parties, or with the instructions received from the highest party bureaus, is a major insecurity component faced by a state. On these and other security challenges faced by the Republic of Moldova, we are inviting you to read further.

# **“The EU that protects”, this is our motto for the next half year**

## **Ambassador Thomas Buchsbaum, Special Representative for the Eastern Partnership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria**

**O**n the 1<sup>st</sup> of July Austria will take over the rotating Presidency of the European Union for the next half year. In the context of preparations for this mandate, HE Thomas Buchsbaum, Special Representative for the Eastern Partnership of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs paid a visit to Chisinau at the end of May. The visit included meetings and discussions with the representatives of the Government and Parliament, as well as with the civil society, including think tanks. Read the following interview to find out about the conclusions of the visit to Chisinau of the Austrian diplomat and about his country's approach to our region in the near future.

■ **Your Excellency, what was the key message you sent to your colleagues in the Foreign Ministry in Vienna about the processes in the Republic of Moldova?**

■ I heard very varied political opinions on foreign policy as well as on the development of democracy and human rights. All my interlocutors were of the opinion that there is still way to go on the path of reforms. The government and the parliamentary majority are trying their best in implementing political, administrative and economic reforms. But implementation of laws and political vision needs time and continuous hard work – which is especially difficult during a pre-election period and when fierce political battles are being fought about fundamental directions of the country.

**“Today it is important to strengthen success”**

■ **In Chisinau, you met with the government representatives, who**



**say that the Republic of Moldova is making considerable progress on the Europeanization path, as well as with the political opposition and civil society who are more sceptical about the depth of reforms. Who was more convincing?**

■ The reform process in Moldova is – as the EaP itself - “a glass neither empty nor full”. What is important is to build upon successes – which certainly are visible in the country, including at the people's level (e.g. visa-free travel to EU, ERASMUS+, etc.), to correct failures, and – like during a marathon – to keep the motivation. Here, maybe, more should be done to make the EaP's benefits clear to the people - in order to uphold and increase the positive views of the EU.

■ **What are the subjects that the above-mentioned entities could give up on the “barricades” for the common good and for the prosperous future of the country and its people?**

■ National consensus is very difficult to be established in any country – and needs honest and careful negotiations between political players as well as within and with civil society. On this way, honesty, calm

moods, de-politicisation of issues and institutions as well as lacking financial interests or influence can help.

■ **Last year, as the country holding the OSCE chairmanship, Austria contributed to boosting the dialogue between the two banks of the Nistru. How do you assess the subsequent developments in the Transnistrian settlement process - developments criticized by a large part of the civil society?**

■ Late last year we witnessed a real breakthrough in the settlement talks – and now it is time to fully implement what has been agreed as well as to agree on the administrative details of the remaining items. So far this year we have observed a positive and constructive approach as regards implementation. Austria supports the constructive spirit of the Sides and is confident that the OSCE is able to maintain and take forward the positive momentum created with the result-oriented approach under the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship in 2017 and the German Chairmanship in 2016, which indeed initially was met with reservations by some civil society organisations in Chisinau. To my understanding the agreements found in November 2017 were largely welcomed by most stakeholders on both sides.

**“We want a democratic and stable eastern neighbourhood”**

■ **What are the plans of the Austrian government during its EU presidency from July 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2018 in connection to Moldova and this region?**

■ Austria's focus in its EU presidency – Austria's already third - is contributing to the stabilisation of EU's neighbourhood and the fostering of good neighbourly relations

- with a democratic, stable, prosperous and resilient Eastern neighbourhood constituting a key EU objective. Austria put its presidency under the motto of an 'EU that protects': A stable and prosperous EaP region would at the same time constitute a protection for the countries and citizens of the partner countries as well as of the EU.

Strengthening and deepening of the EaP is one of Austria's presidency priorities for the external relations of the EU. While primarily, this means "implementation, implementation, and implementation" from both sides, and making the multilateral structures quickly operational and delivering, we will strive for and support, progress in the contractual relations under negotiations and for finding ways to implement the EU's 'more-for-more policy' with respect to the partner countries having Association Agreements in force. Strategic Communication has to become an inherent and major element of the EaP – both in the partner countries and member states. And this, first of all, means to explain EU and EU action in the partner countries - well beyond the political establishments and capitals.

■ **Does the Eastern Partnership still exist? Or, exactly, does it still exist in the original version? What could and what should follow for these countries? Because the current state of "suspension" seems to fatigue both the EU and the EaP...**

■ I neither see fatigue nor suspension within the EaP. On the contrary: The EaP Summit of Brussels of 24 November last year gave a clear signal of a positive reset. The high-level participation both from the partner countries and the EU Member States, the progress of contractual relations, the renewed interest by non-associated partner countries, the new structures and in particular the commonly agreed '20 deliverables for 2020' showed renewed strength and willingness of the EaP and its participating states to progress along agreed lines and on very concrete goals and projects.

■ **What do you think of the assertion that, according to the EU "multi-speed" model, neither the Eastern Partnership is a homogeneous entity?**

■ The EU switched in relation to the EaP partner countries from a group approach to a strategy of diversification, while keeping a common approach: dealing with each partner country on its own merits. Whenever a country was or will be ready to make a step which is offered by the EaP, this step may be taken together. So there is no "package approach" any more, even if the EaP as such has basic provisions and concepts, which it does not impose but leaves it up to sovereign countries to decide to join or not. And – as the EU itself – the EaP is value-based which includes a genuine, inclusive and participatory democracy, rule of law, good governance, accountable and transparent democratic institutions and mechanisms, as well as human and – any kind of - minority rights, and human security.

***"Elections are the main means of expressing the political choice of people"***

■ **During your meetings, you have reiterated Austria's support for Moldova's reform agenda. What is Vienna's priority?**

■ The role of an EU Presidency is to be an honest 'broker' between EU Member States and at the same time to speed up and, hopefully, conclude, pending issues. Austria's and the EU's main priorities for reforms in Moldova are fighting against corruption – including the fight against money-laundering, and judicially as well as financially completely closing the fall-out of the banking fraud -, the reform of the justice sector and the situation in the media sector. And to be clear: It is not Austria nor the EU, but the citizens of Moldova who demand and expect functioning, transparent and delivering democratic institutions and mechanisms.

■ On a more national note – but of great interest also to other EU Member States -, I wish Moldova a dynamic economic development and a de-iure and de-facto good investment climate which is key to the economic development. Austrian companies take an active interest in this region and the Austrian government actively encourages this. Economic growth will finally contribute to improve the lives of people – which, at the same time, is a main goal of the EaP.

■ **After talks with you, President Igor Dodon mentioned "the openness and desire of the Austrian colleagues to offer Moldova a solid support in promoting the concept of strengthening the neutrality status of our country." What could exactly this support be?**

■ Austria – like Moldova – has its neutrality enshrined in its constitution, and neutrality – as in Moldova – has a broad support by the population. As no situation of a country is comparable to another, academics from Austria could explain the concept of Austria's neutrality and the historically different stages of its neutrality policy, but certainly could not tell Moldova how the country could shape its own neutrality. What seems of particular importance to me is that Austria's permanent neutrality has no ideological component, consists of not acceding to any military alliance nor allowing foreign troops to be stationed on its territory, and is fully compatible with her EU membership including its active participation in the EU's CSDP and its developing PESCO.

■ **The year 2018 is par excellence an electoral year. What would you suggest to the Moldovan authorities and Moldovan citizens, so that the inter-party and electoral struggle don't affect the good functioning of the democratic institutions, the state institutions and, ultimately, the European path of our country?**

■ Elections are the primary means of expressing the people's political choice. Transparent, inclusive and credible elections are thus of paramount importance. An election law should be based upon a large consensus of political actors and civil society – and implement recommendations of the OSCE ODIHR and the Venice Commission. Election campaigns including funds should strictly follow European rules including a transparent and accountable control. And international and – even more important – domestic election observers have to be granted full and unhindered access not only during voting and counting days, but also in the run-off to the elections.

■ Thank you.

**Sorina Ștefăruță**

## Editorial

# Who do the bells of justice in the Republic of Moldova ring out for?

**Igor Munteanu,**  
Executive director,  
IDIS „Viitorul”

**The decision to invalidate the results of the Chisinau Municipal Election (3 June, 2009) and the maintenance of the first instance court's decision by the Court of Appeal is setting the citizens of the Republic of Moldova as well as the foreign partners of the country ablaze.**

**Univocally, justice has lost a very good opportunity to wash away the accusations brought against it - that it serves narrow circles of political profiteers, and that it doesn't work in the name of fairness and justice.**

Hundreds of citizens have protested against this injustice in the past week, arguing that an abusive decision is stealing one of their inalienable rights – to right to elect local representatives - respectively against the arguments put forward by the court judges regarded as “puerile and lacking common sense”. The judges are suspected of playing the game of the Democratic Party that wants to prevent the candidate of the united opposition, Andrei Nastase, from taking over the executive control of the capital, and with it - to give a lesson to everybody who doubted the “obstinacy” of the Power to stay in power. And in order to achieve its goal, they use the clientelism of a weak justice ... It is interesting to note that the sense of illegality is being felt even by the political party that lost the elections, which increases the perception of the public about the decisions taken by the court regarding the cancellation of perfectly valid elections.

The consequences of this situation are multiple. The public perceives the invalidation of elections in the capital as a personal affront, which rips up the credibility of the system and deepens the rupture between the Power and society. Indignant with the unlawfulness of the adopted decisions, several protesters have launched blame for power and justice, followed by an impressive number of citizens (about 30,000 marching) on Sunday, 24 June, who continued the peaceful protest against the invalidation of the local elections' results in Chisinau. The protests suggest a prominent mobilization of the opposition, which is going to severely penalise these undemocratic deviations of the



Power, stimulating the desire to participate in the life of the “city” of some segments that had treated with lots of indifference the political scene on which nothing important was happening. We can say that the illegalities have shaken the bell of justice, which has awakened for action a deeply revolted audience that was looking for a pretext. On June 22, the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM) launched an appeal to citizens and the press, calling for a “reasonable

approach”, but it seems that the SCM message misses an essential element of this situation - the public is demanding impartial justice rather than calmness, and restoration of electoral justice rather than the status quo in a matter which means to the people violation of “red lines”, one of which is the direct elections of local power.

The incident that hasn't consumed until present has prompted harsh reactions from external actors. The reactions, though generally benign but firm, have been echoed by the Head of the EU Delegation to Chisinau, Peter Michalko, the European External Action Service (June 20th), the European Parliament (June 21st), the European People's Party (June 20th), the US State Department (June 21st). Thus, the main foreign partners have fixed in their interventions a significant rebound of the electoral democracy in the Republic of Moldova and an unprecedented interference in the judicial act. This recoil is contrary to the European standards that are circumscribed by the RM-EU Association Agreement and is all the more serious as the leader of the Democratic Party has assumed over the last years the status (confirmed in press conferences) of giving directions to all the powers in the state, from his position as the main decision-maker of this party. The perception is creating the political realities, which means that everything happening between the Opposition and the courts involved in the deliberation of this case will have repercussions on the macro-financial assistance, but also on how the political process is being evaluated by the EU institutions (Commission, Council and Parliament). Respect of the popular vote is a sine-qua-non condition of any government pretending to be democratic - and even more so, of a government engaged in a Political Association Agreement with the EU.

I will remind in this context that securing the independence of justice is one of the clearest and most non-negotiable conditions imposed by the EU on Moldovan authorities with the clear goal of ending political clientelism, emphasized by the instrumentation of selective justice for the benefit of oligarchic groups and the rehabilitation of the citizens' trust in the rule of law. This priority of the dialogue between the official Chisinau and the EU institutions can be found in all- without exception- political documents adopted in the last years by the two sides. And the fact that things did not improve significantly in this respect is proved also by the neutral finding that there is no difference in the articulation of this serious problem in the Moldovan justice in the text of the recommendations of the European Council from 15 April 2016 and in those of the EU-Moldova Council from February 2018. The EU remains deeply concerned by the lack of independence of the judiciary and the prosecutor's office in our country, which undermines the principles of efficiency, transparency and accountability of those who should protect the citizens from abuse, corruption and impunity in society. Neither the latest Report on the implementation of the Moldova-EU Association Agreement (April 2018) leaves much room for enthusiasm. The technical style adopted to describe the monitored institutions and indicators is hiding a clear dissatisfaction of the EU, which is attesting lack of political will and the ambiguities of political actions taken recently by the ruling party (Democratic Party of Moldova).

The change in the electoral system in 2017 has totally contrasted with the recommendations of the Venice Commission (CoE / OSCE-ODIHR), showing a certain desire to change the rules of play for the benefit of those in power and to the detriment of the fundamental norms of the political association with the EU. On 26 February 2018, the European Union's Foreign Ministers unanimously supported that 100 million euros of assistance requested by the Chisinau authorities will only be granted according to the progress achieved by the Republic of Moldova, with reference to the above-mentioned conditions: the rule of law, the multi-party system and the guarantee of respect for human rights. Moreover, Federica Mogherini, the head of European diplomacy, has underlined the existence of "trends" that strengthened the EU's concerns about the political situation in the Republic of Moldova, including among others the politicization of state institutions, media clientelization, systemic corruption and weak governance, which could complicate the provision of the required assistance. The reforms are stagnating and most of the progress indicators in agriculture or education remain isolated, having a modest impact on the overall situation.

The investigations of the banking fraud are being dragged on despite the rhetoric of Moldovan officials about being maximally open and firmly committed to this end. At the same time, the lack of concrete results in the management of the "Russian laundromat" and "theft of the billion" is fuelling the EU reluctance to credit anything in white, which would justify provision of community benefits. Trust is lost and its restoration will take time and probably require a radical change of the political class in the Republic of Moldova.

The EU calls on the Moldovan authorities to make progress in ensuring the state's functionality, including but not limited to removing the judiciary from the political clientelism, anti-corruption policies that should not protect the interests of those involved in hidden schemes, while streamlining integrity policies and stimulating local autonomy. It is counterproductive for the EU to tolerate the exploitation of formal institutions of dialogue by political actors in the Republic of Moldova, without the benefits of the association influencing the lives of ordinary people. The European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) aim to monitor in detail the fulfilment of the conditions and objectives of the political association in strict compliance with Art. 212 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

The increased demand of European officials towards the endemic character of corruption and the deficiencies of the political regime in the Republic of Moldova are fixed up in the latest Monitoring Report on the implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement. The document points out to the deficiencies of the implementation, as well as to some objective limits in the implementation of management corrections of the reforms conducted with external support. So, despite the "conditionality" imposed in the EU-Moldova dialogue following the "cookie and whip" model, it is clear that both signatories of the Association Agreement need new social energies that would prevent the "downplaying" of the bilateral relationship and provide new roles to certain societal actors (the press, local authorities, civil society), thus generating more "social resilience", while the European education could create beneficial pressure on the quality of public services, and help improve interaction with the police, the judiciary and the central government. The EU would like to involve in its dialogue with the Moldovan society not only the government but also a broader range of autonomous actors capable to better understand the diverse interests of the society they represent and to transform from net beneficiaries in net contributors to the Europeanization process of the state. Only when this happens, will we find out who the bells of justice in the Republic of Moldova ring out for.

## Nicu Popescu: "Corruption is rapidly becoming a major security issue"

**W**e met one Friday morning in his office, which is full of books and magazines, at the Institute of the European Union for Security Studies in Paris. Nicu Popescu has been working there for five years as a senior researcher. As part of his work, Mr Popescu has produced numerous studies and publications about the post-soviet space. Since our meeting took place exactly two days after the controversial "death" and then "resurrection" of the Russian journalist Arkadi Babchenko, the discussion - which we intended to be about the regional and international security challenges of the moment - led us, volens-nolens, in Kiev.

■ **Mr Popescu, how is Ukraine seen in the European states today, after more than four years since the start of the active armed conflict with the Russian Federation?**

■ The intensity of emotions has obviously decreased, but the diplomatic dialogue between Russia and the West remains strictly on a few subjects - Ukraine, Syria, and the sanctions. Neither in mutual visits - much less, by the way - is any positive agenda discussed, but Ukraine, Syria, and sanctions. This is a proof that Ukraine is still on the agenda ... However, in parallel with it, the EU is wondering today: to what extent is Ukraine progressing in the reform process? Because the EU has gone through several disappointments: Saakashvili, Yushchenko, the success story of Moldova...

■ **Is it not "surrealist" to expect success from a country in a war situation?**

■ It is true, and yet ... some of the European political spectrum says that, under these circumstances, Ukraine cannot handle it, it is not fighting against corruption, and it is on the same trajectory with Yushchenko or some pro-European governments in Moldova when many pro-EU statements are being made, but in reality it is stealing. Another part of this spectrum thinks that



in Ukraine, although there is no dynamic reform process, in certain sectors the reforms are continuing and are even impressive. One example in this sense is the "Naftogaz" company which in the last three years has reached a profit of one billion dollars from a deficit of eight billion. Those who want to see the "full glass" believe that you cannot liquidate a nine billion-dollar hole just on efficiency gains, and that this money comes from eliminating major corruption schemes. But even so, in Ukraine there is no dynamic of reforms at the level of the entire public administration.

■ **How big is the risk that the sanctions imposed on Russia will create a crack in the EU?**

■ Generally, there are already five or six EU states that are against these sanctions. In addition, any country can apply the veto, but no one has done so before. This is because all these states do not want to enter into a conflict with other EU members, knowing that they are risking to lose in area areas. I believe that today the EU's sanctions policy towards Russia is quite consolidated. The EU's position is the following: we have imposed sanctions on Ukraine; we want to lift them, but provided there is some progress in Donbass. So far, there has been no progress.

**Moldova's problem is not the package, but the lack of reforms and the state capture**

■ **There is a kind of conviction-expectation in our region that, in a critical situation, Europe or the USA will choose in our favour - they will confront Russia, for instance. How realistic is this approach?**

■ If is to refer to military issues, the only states the West is obliged to protect are the NATO members. But even in the famous Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, it is said that in the event of an attack on an allied state, the others should help, but without any legal constraint mechanism. Thus, the decision to send troops to war is always taken at the national level, not by the Alliance. But outside the military spectrum, the West realizes a few things: that countries like Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova do not want to be Moscow's satellites, and that Russia cannot re-impose its dominance over these states. An evidence of that is the last 30 years - a period of the Russian politics in the post-Soviet space full of failures. Russia had neither the economic, diplomatic nor military capacity to influence Ukraine or Georgia as it did with Belarus or Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, at this historical stage, the West also has neither the capacity nor the desire to integrate these countries into the EU or NATO. And this is how this space remains in a kind of mutual blockage between the West-East. How should you deal with them? You are trying to manage them with minimal losses, waiting for other phases or even historical opportunities.

■ **To what extent are the Western Balkans, which have just received a promising impetus for accession, a good signal for us?**

■ First of all, let's not forget that the Western Balkans are geographically within the borders of the Union. However, for the time being, it is not known how things will evolve, because even in these countries the

process of European integration is not very clear. By the way, in Moldova or in Ukraine, you can frequently hear that the European Neighbourhood Policy did not work, because the EU did not offer these countries a prospect of accession. The Balkans show that such a perspective - which many countries in this region have had for 15 years - doesn't solve your internal problems at all. Macedonia has had quite an authoritarian government for almost a decade, which was kicked out as a result of important street pressure a year ago. Montenegro has been ruled by the same person for more than 20 years – sometimes president, sometimes prime minister, and sometimes a kind of shadow governor of the ruling coalition ... as it is today the case in the Republic of Moldova. However, in order to truly advance on the path of Euro-integration, you need popular support for reforms and an accountable political class which would like and could do these reforms. If you don't have this, you cannot get too far. External factors can help you, but the effort should be yours.

■ **What are the chances of these countries to be treated or not as a “package”?**

■ I think the Balkans will be a useful lesson for us, and namely, they will show us that states are treated differently, depending on merit and performance. The picture is obvious: Croatia has been an EU member for five years already, Serbia is making some progress, Montenegro is negotiating, Albania is queuing ... That is why, in the case of the Eastern Partnership that we are part of, we should not fear that we are in the same package with Georgia and Ukraine - if we do our homework, we will go ahead. Just as it was in the case of Croatia – the fact it was in the same package with Macedonia or Albania did not prevent it from joining the EU. The package may be broken if you are consistent and persistent. The problem of the Republic of Moldova is not the package but the lack of reforms, lack of progress in the fight against corruption and the state capture, which seems to have determined the functioning of Moldovan politics over the last 20 years.

**Security challenges are much more than military ones**

■ **How do internal challenges fuel the country's security problems?**

■ The security of a state involves many things. For example, defense capability depends on an army in which public procurement is done correctly; on the citizens who trust in the army; on the politicians who invest state resources in defense, not in their own pockets. Everything, provided corruption is cleared. Because corruption can quickly become - and has become in the case of the Republic of Moldova, but also in Ukraine, a major security challenge that can be exploited by external actors. Corruption is eroding the budget funds that could go to defend the country. At the same time, corrupt politicians can at any time be bought and influenced from outside. Donbass is a telling example in this sense ... In 2014, Russia and the local actors who began the military hostilities in the region knew very well how to convince the special services and the Ukrainian army in the territory, by financial instruments, not to react to the takeover of public institutions, which has eventually led to the war.

■ **In this context, how was “the assassination” and then “resurrection” of the Ukrainian journalist Arkadi Babchenko, interpreted? The journalistic environment had, let's say, a certain moral discomfort. How did the political environment react?**

■ We all know the wolf's story ... That's exactly the case. We have already had a series of assassinations in the West and the Middle East, but also in Ukraine, where either Moscow has been caught on a hair trigger or there is a high probability that it was involved. Obviously, also in this case, the immediate reaction was that Russia stands behind Babchenko's assassination. Naturally, there has been a wave of diplomatic and political condemnations. And, naturally, at the time of his re-emergence - which everyone was happy about - many decision-makers in the EU or the USA have found themselves in a stupid situation, which didn't look good at all. So what happened in Kiev creates image and credibility problems not only for the journalism, but also for the Ukrainian special services. Because in the situation of every possible incident in Ukraine, there is a risk that a foreign minister or European head of state - or the “Le Monde” newspaper which made the “assassination” a headline – will think twice whether to come up with a tough reaction or wait, so as not to face a “surprise” ... For without knowing exactly what the ins and outs are, such a practice doesn't seem convincing at all. And even if there were serious reasons to

use that scenario, the latter can do a disservice to both Kiev and the Ukrainian services.

■ **Even if you are saying that for 30 years Russia has failed to re-impose itself in the former Soviet space, there are dozens of scenarios that anticipate the opposite. One of them says that Moscow could act in southern Ukraine ...**

■ This expectation of some people and the fear of others was more pronounced until March-April 2014. I believe that in Russia it was hoped that half or at least a third of Eastern and South-Eastern Ukraine would rise against Kiev. But the open military rebel area was much smaller, most of the population in the eastern regions of Ukraine choosing not to rebel against Kiev. Even Donetsk and Lugansk did not completely separate, which was an unpleasant surprise for the Russians. Respectively, this theoretical movement of Russia towards Odessa is not a credible risk as long as Ukraine remains as stable as possible. Russians can fan the flames a little bit, but for the fire to be set, a strong boiling process is needed in Ukraine so that they can feed it.

■ **In our case the boiling process is just starting, together with the elections...**

■ In the same context, the question of concern to me is the following. In France, they are discussing about Russia's involvement in the last presidential election - the so-called “MacronLeaks affair”; in the USA, the Muller Investigation is being conducted in order to understand how the Russians have influenced the elections through cyber activities, formation of the public opinion through Facebook, tensions between different communities, etc. And if that is happening in the United States or France, just imagine what could happen in the Republic of Moldova, where a large part of the population is on Odnoklassniki! .. And while Facebook is trying to reduce the number of trolls and false accounts, Odnoklassniki - to which the Moldovan electoral space is extremely exposed - will probably even increase their size. So, what cyber-defense capabilities do we have, including in an electoral period, when there is no budget earmarked for these purposes or salaries for good soft developers? As I was saying, the security challenges are much more than military ones.

■ **Thanks for the discussion.**

*Sorina Ștefârță*

## Opinion of Parties

# Security challenges of the country- what they are and how they should be tackled

**T**he “Opinion of Parties” column was launched in the context of the 2018 electoral year and provides the political parties and potential aspirants to the Moldovan parliament with an additional platform to make public their position on various social and political issues of major interest to citizens. This time, we have asked representatives of four parties to tell us about their party’s foreign policy vision.

1. Which are in the opinion of the party that you represent the biggest security challenges for the Republic of Moldova?
2. Are these “innocent” mistakes of the transition years or are they knowingly admitted vulnerabilities?
3. What solutions does your party have for these challenges?

### Transnistrian dossier, energy alternative and economic growth



**Adrian Buligari, member of the Foreign Relations Department, PDM**

#### 1.

We look at security issues in a complex way, because in the contemporary world,

national security is no longer just about the military dimension. Today there are several things that pose security risks and generate vulnerabilities for our country. However, we believe that three of them require increased attention: the frozen conflict in Transnistria, the energy dependence on a single supplier and the still low level of development of the national economy.

The Transnistrian issue is, of course, the most serious security issue in the Republic of Moldova. The fact that we have a separatist region on whose territory foreign military forces are stationed and the absence of a constitutional control over that region poses a permanent risk at our eastern border. The latter generates other problems such as smuggling, money laundering, trafficking in human beings, etc. In turn, energy dependence upon

one supplier makes us vulnerable to any supply disruptions and, certainly, to the risk of political use of energy resources. Even if such things do not actually happen, this risk cannot be ruled out and solutions have to be found.

After all, the still low level of economic development poses a national security problem of another kind. This means that Moldova is more vulnerable than other countries to possible economic and social crises. As a result, more effort is needed to increase the level of economic development - and important steps have been taken in recent years.

#### 2.

All these three challenges are, after all, part of our historical heritage. But we can say that since independence, we have not done our utmost to overcome or minimize them, including in terms of associated risks. Regarding the Transnistrian issue, you know the nature of the problem and the presence of Russia as a decisive actor, coupled with the limited influence of the Republic of Moldova on international level, kept things in an unfavourable state for us. Regardless of the external factors, however, Chisinau can never give up on a territory that belongs to it. At the same time, we cannot accept any regulatory solution that is not based on respect for national sovereignty and independence. That is why federalization of the country is not an option for the Democratic Party of Moldova.

The economic issue has a more complicated solution, but, paradoxically, it sounds more feasible in the sense that it depends much more on us than on others. For quite some time, the Republic of Moldova has made the mistake of remaining undecided between the EU and the CIS, which hindered our development. Some have done so knowingly, others have been naïve to believe they are making the right decision, postponing any decision. It is good, however, that now the direction towards the European Union is clear. And it is very important to build popular consensus to make this option irreversible. However, the energy



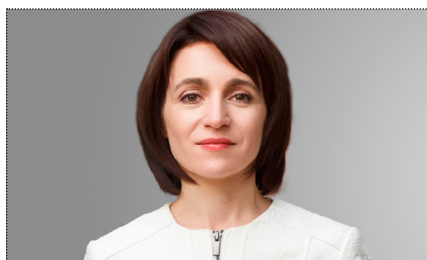
issue could be solved a long time ago, and probably that was the vulnerability that Chisinau admitted knowingly. Theoretically, an energy alternative could have existed ten years ago.

## 3.

Last year, after several years of stagnation and even regress, the PDM governance made a major breakthrough in the Transnistrian issue. These concrete progress, however- from schools with teaching in the Latin script on the left bank of the Nistru to the access of farmers in Dubasari to their own land or the apostille of diplomas- should create a favourable context for addressing the main issue of the Transnistrian conflict, namely the reintegration of the country. In the given context, the strengthening of the National Army is very important. The government is working on increasing the army operational capacity and professionalism, and this will help strengthen the national security when it comes to the military dimension.

Regarding the energy alternative, the PDM government is building it right now through the Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline and there are chances that we will have this alternative in two years. It will be a great achievement for us and we will be able to choose between gas suppliers and soon we will have also new options in terms of electricity. Energy interconnection with the EU has clear benefits - both national and economic security. Regarding the economic development, the PDM solution is to follow our path towards the European integration, opening up our country further to foreign investment, accelerating the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Area and modernizing our legislation according to the European model. The experience of the East European countries that have joined the EU gives us a clear model of economic and social success, we only have to be wise and follow their example to get the same positive results. Thus we will be able to reduce the flow of migration and even bring home our fellow citizens.

### **The use of justice in political struggle is the most serious challenge**



**Maia Sandu, Chairwoman of the Action and Solidarity Party**

## 1.

The Republic of Moldova is facing a large number of challenges in the field of national security, including both military, political, economic and social issues. The biggest military threat is the presence of Russian troops on the territory of the left bank of the Nistru. In fact, this frozen conflict is a fundamental threat to the security of the state and its citizens. Among other challenges is the lack of progress in resolving the Transnistrian conflict, because it perpetuates a status quo that keeps our country in a position of major vulnerability.

Another challenge is the excessive dependence on a single supplier of energy resources, whether natural gas (Gazprom) or electricity (Inter RAO). Both suppliers are the property of the Kremlin, so we depend almost entirely on Russia, while the interconnection process with Romania and thus with the European market does not seem to move fast enough. We know that energy import schemes have always been and, unfortunately, are still a source of income for corrupt governments who remain indifferent to the vulnerability of the state that they should defend.

However, endemic corruption and the capture of state institutions by obscure interest groups is probably the biggest threat. Political control over the justice system makes it impossible to fight the scourge of high-level corruption. And at this end of June, we are all witnessing the destruction of the last remains of democracy and the rule of law in our country. Thus,

the use of justice in the political struggle by invalidating the elections won democratically by opponents uncomfortable to the regime is the most serious threat to the stability of the political system. Slipping into dictatorship is no longer a metaphor, but a sad and dangerous reality that puts a damper on the democratic and European aspirations of the country.

## 2.

The military and economic vulnerabilities are largely the result of our unfortunate past. However, the country's leadership of the transition period - where we still find ourselves, by the way - have failed to strengthen the defense capabilities or to diminish the country's vulnerabilities in strategic areas such as the energy sector, the information space, the conflict on the left bank of the Nistru River, etc. Some of these mistakes can be attributed to the lack of experience and resources; but the lack of a clear democratic vision and strong will at the level of the political class have determined the deepening and increasing of the vulnerability of the Republic of Moldova to both external and internal threats. Consequently, we have reached a point today that our country looks more and more like the dictatorial regimes in Asia and is getting further away from the European aspirations of most citizens. All these abuses, which are becoming more and more precipitous, cannot be regarded as "innocent" mistakes, because they are harmful decisions applied by the government and are perfectly congruent with the interests of the foreign enemies of the Republic of Moldova. Inducing the country into dictatorship and burning bridges with external partners can only strengthen the status of a gray area of instability and lawlessness in our country for many years ahead.

## 3.

In the context of the Transnistrian conflict, in the absence of a governmental strategy, the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) will come up with its own strategic vision, based on respecting the citizens' will to live in peace and well-being in a unitary and indivisible state. The PAS will focus on respect for human rights and the rule of law in the Republic of Moldova, including the Nistru region. We will

start from the imperative of democratizing the region, including in the context of the Association Agreement with the European Union, which opens up new perspectives for citizens and the business community on both sides.

The PAS will accelerate the energy interconnection process with the European market on both the gas and electricity. We will pursue policies of facilitating the use of renewable energy and the best European practices in the field of energy conservation in public and private institutions. At the same time, the PAS will ensure the country's informational security through democratic and effective means, by resorting to justice. Also through justice, we will fight against high-level endemic corruption, thus reducing internal and external vulnerabilities that undermine the security and good governance of the country.

However, in order for any of these measures to be successful, the Moldovan justice should be released from the political control of the oligarchy, and with it – to release the state from captivity and turn it back to the people.

### **Between internal and external factors, the state capture remains the great threat**



**Andrei Năstase, chairman of the „Dignity and Truth” Platform**

1.

The Republic of Moldova is facing several categories of challenges that have a direct impact on the national security. The first category that combines internal factors is manifested by the capture of state institutions by the gang led by the oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc and by compromising the mechanisms of the rule of law. The

serious situation that our country finds itself in - antidemocratic abuses, increased human rights' violations, impoverishment of the population, falling birth rates, and degradation of the economic and social situation, mass exodus – are consequences of these factors that have a significant impact on the national security. Of particular importance are the demographic and exodus issues, which as a result of the disastrous policies of the government, are threatening the development prospects of the Republic of Moldova. The second category of factors is related to the Transnistrian conflict. The biggest problem is that some circles or influential people in the Republic of Moldova - especially Plahotniuc - are interested in maintaining on the left bank of the Nistru an uncontrolled space, a grey area which, in the absence of minimum regulations, transparency, and some democratic process, has become over a period of 25 years a paradise for money laundering, tax evasion and smuggling. The third category of challenges refers to the energy dependence of the Republic of Moldova. The big problem here is that there is too much energy dependence on a single supplier, which is the Russian Federation, both for purchasing natural gas and for generating electricity.

Besides, I would like to mention the accumulation of more than six billion USD debt to the Russian Gazprom Concern for natural gas, which weakens the positions of the Republic of Moldova. The fact is that as a result of the Plahotniuc regime, there has been a massive economic crime for a number of years- more than 20 million dollars from electricity bills paid by Moldovan consumers has reached the accounts of some offshore companies. Finally, we cannot ignore the danger of destroying the Nistru River because of Ukraine, which has built and is about to build more hydropower plants that could seriously affect the security and health of the population.

2.

For the most part, the vulnerabilities listed above were committed knowingly. The bases were laid by the Communists, but the greatest responsibility lies with the so-called pro-European governments that came to power in 2009 - especially the Plahotniuc

regime, which in 2016 took over total power. Although they enjoyed the support of European and international partners, in the context of a positive international climate, those governments missed the chance to advance with long-term solutions to strengthen the security of the Republic of Moldova.

3.

With regard to internal factors affecting our security, the priority is to remove the country from captivity, strengthen the rule of law, and strengthen the capacity of the institutions responsible for combating corruption, justice reform and the reform of the regulating institutions. Without this, no political and economic initiative can be seriously discussed. And this can only be done after the change of government. Regarding the Transnistrian problem, we reiterate our position for the peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. However, we do not accept the idea of federalizing the Republic of Moldova - our vision starts from the premise that a viable solution can be identified only by respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country by granting a broader autonomy to the Transnistrian region. Of course, the right bank could become an attractive model for the Transnistrian region only after the liberation of the state from the oligarchic captivity and the return of the country to normality. Therefore, for the time being, it is essential to promote confidence-building measures between the two banks of the Nistru. And the Moldovan diplomacy must constantly insist on bringing the Transnistrian issue on the agenda of the EU, the United States of America, Russia, Ukraine and international institutions.

Regarding the strengthening of the energy independence, we advocate the interconnection with the Romanian energy system in order to gain access to the EU energy and gas market, and to diversify the energy sources. Another priority is to identify, together with Russian decision makers and with the participation of international mediators, a solution to overcome the debt of more than six billion dollars for natural gas. As regards stimulating alternative energy production projects and capitalizing on domestic biomass resources, we believe

that this can be done efficiently by attracting foreign investment and by implementing state-of-the-art technologies. After all, the vital issue of the Nistru: it is important that, through active diplomatic actions, including by addressing development partners, we take decisive steps to persuade the Ukrainian side to abandon the construction of hydropower plants, because this project is jeopardizing the national security of the Republic of Moldova.

### **Rule of law and security guarantees by joining NATO**



**Anatol Șalaru, executive chairman of the National Unity Party (PUN)**

1.

The Republic of Moldova is facing challenges on all levels: military, political, economic, social and environmental. In fact, we are in an area of high instability and insecurity which, within the state, are amplified by political indecision and geopolitical duplicity. One of the great security challenges is therefore our stay in the buffer zone, in the

gray area of international relations, because in such areas there will never be either security, rule of law or prosperity. They add to the existence of a separatist entity over the Nistru, supported and defended by the Operational Group of Russian forces- and this is the biggest challenge to the national security.

The lack of security guarantees dictated by state neutrality - a neutrality declared in the Constitution, but unrecognized by anyone and flagrantly violated by the Russian Federation - amplifies the danger created by the Transnistrian region. In addition, the secessionist potential of Gagauzia, fed by the Russian Federation generates insecurity. At the same time, the lack of state reform, endemic corruption, the existence of some institutions characterized with "indulgence" as "semi-functional" represent extremely dangerous challenges to the security of the Republic of Moldova. And that's because it makes it extremely vulnerable to influences coming from outside, especially from the Russian Federation. In particular, this type of vulnerability favours hybrid-specific actions ... Not least daring is the lack of social cohesion and the excessive migration, which are challenges that our very existence depends upon.

2.

Undoubtedly, the first years of Independence of our country were also marked by mistakes. However, I tend to think that most of the vulnerabilities have been developed on purpose in order to protect their own

interests. For example, the corruption that almost led us to bankruptcy as a state was supported and fueled by all the leadership of the Republic of Moldova. Lack of state reform of the state or politicizing the institutions to the point of being no longer functional are done knowingly and under no circumstances can they fall into the category of mistakes. At the same time, we cannot ignore the unfavorable influence of Russia in the Republic of Moldova, where it acted as an agent of dissolution and vulnerability of the country. Without Moscow's interference, which supported and emphasized the growing vulnerabilities, the Republic of Moldova would have surely had another trajectory.

3.

In PUN's view, the security issues need to be addressed on two dimensions. On the one hand, the internal vulnerabilities should be minimized - making it possible to reform the state by ensuring the real functioning of public institutions, by combating corruption, increasing the capacity of national structures to respond to national security and raising living standards. On the other hand, it is necessary to identify security guarantees. From our point of view, this can be achieved by getting out of neutrality and by joining NATO. In short: the rule of law and security guarantees by joining NATO's most long-lived and democratic military bloc. Another solution that we propose - and which is most viable, given the fact that the prospect of joining the EU and NATO still does not exist - is reunification with Romania.

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