

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.

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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



Less than one month after swearing into office, the Maia Sandu Government took several steps to restore and strengthen the country's dialogue with the European Union. During her first visit to Brussels, the head of the Cabinet of Ministers had several meetings with senior EU officials, who assured her of the readiness both at the EU and Member State level to support the Republic of Moldova in the reform process and in building of functional institutions. Maia Sandu informed the EU officials about the latest political developments in Chisinau and said that the current government aims at rebuilding democratic institutions and restoring citizens' confidence in their own state. The topics related to the EU assistance, trade relations, energy security, the sectoral dimension of the Association Agreement and the plenary use of the Free Trade Area were also addressed. The conditions for unlocking the European financial assistance is a special topic.



On July 1st, the Embassy of Romania to Chișinău organized an informal event to mark the successful conclusion of the first Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union on June 30th, 2019. The event was attended by members of the Government, MPs and other senior officials, diplomats accredited in Chisinau, representatives of the academia, cultural and civil society of the Republic of Moldova. In his speech, the Romanian Ambassador Daniel Ioniță reviewed the achievements of the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council of which: over 90 EU legislative acts for the future of Europe and for the benefit of all Europeans; the organization of the informal EU summit in Sibiu on May 9th at which the EU Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their commitment to continue working with partners around the world; the organization of the Brussels meeting (June 20th), where the European Council established the general priorities that will guide the EU's work over the next five years; consolidation of the Eastern Partnership - a priority of the Romanian Presidency's Agenda. In this context, "Romania's willingness to continue its strong support for the European path and the reforms necessary for the Republic of Moldova, both at European and bilateral level, has been reaffirmed". It was also reiterated that "Romania is ready to help Chisinau to fulfil its commitments in the relationship with the European Union and to communicate the achievements of the Republic of Moldova in Brussels".



The USA government will increase funding for democratic governance and economic growth in Moldova by USD 29 million, based on two implementation letters signed by Premier Maia Sandu and Brock Bierman, deputy USAID Bureau Administrator for Europe and Eurasia. The expected funding for democratic governance will facilitate creation of functional institutions and involve citizens in the decision-making, promote efficiency and transparency of local governments, improve access to municipal services, and promote decentralization and judicial reforms. Other key areas are creating favourable conditions for civil society organizations and the media. Financing aimed at contributing to economic growth will promote the export-oriented economy, boosting competitiveness, creating jobs and diversifying energy sources.

An idealistic project on the sharp sword of hope...



Berlin, July 16, 2019

Sorina Ștefârță

The photo that opens this edition of the Newsletter is opening also a new historic stage *in* and *for* the Republic of Moldova: Maia Sandu as Prime Minister, chatting serenely with

the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the most important European personality of the moment. Who could imagine it two or three months ago? (I don't dare to ask "Who knew it?") What is certain is that after "the great

disappointment in Filat" in 2015, then after "the great disappointment in Leanca" in 2016, it seemed that Angela's heart, just like the gates of Berlin, closed for Moldova for many years. But things can really change overnight and...

An idealistic project on the sharp sword of hope...

► The messages sent from Chisinau since June 8th are firm and bold.

- “Your support for the Republic of Moldova has never been about interests. For us and for you, the changes in the governing system of our country are about the transformative power of European ideals, about the power of attraction of a democratic liberal model of society based on freedom, human rights and the social market economy. “
- “I know you are disappointed by many Moldovan politicians. I am here today to ask you to believe in my country’s prospect of becoming a functioning European state. A difficult task is lying ahead of us. We fought against an oppressive state and stopped the total decline of the Republic of Moldova. Now we have to rebuild the state and restore the trust of our citizens and of the strategic partners in our country. We need to clean Moldova from corruption and money laundering schemes and make sure that the state institutions work to the citizens’ interest.
- “No transition state can reach these goals without delay. What matters now is the direction we are heading to and the reasons that guide us. I will insist on the appointment of politically non-affiliated professionals in key positions, such as the General Prosecutor, judges at the Constitutional Court and senior management positions in anti-corruption institutions. These people will be independent and will not accept orders from anyone, as happened in the past. This is a fundamental principle that we will respect unconditionally. “

- “We want to relaunch the idealist project on the development of the Republic of Moldova. We will not only say that we are Europeans. What we are proposing is to change the Republic of Moldova from within so that we can be accepted into the European Union as a reliable member with functional democratic institutions. More than ever, we rely on your support for the process of transforming the country into a European state that puts the citizens’ interests on top of the priorities’ list.

The above are just a few of Maia Sandu’s messages from July 16th in Berlin, and I am convinced that even the challengers of this new Power would like her to succeed. For the stability was already too “bitter”... Meanwhile, in Brussels, the hope for the Republic of Moldova has reappeared with the new MEPs.

“The EU has a very powerful and unique instrument for the proliferation of security, stability, rule of law and growth – the enlargement policy. I would like to take the opportunity to urge the new President of the European Commission to promote an ambitious enlargement policy – for to the countries of the Western Balkans and later for Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. People in these countries deserve our solidarity and we deserve a peaceful and stable neighbourhood ... “, the Lithuanian deputy Andrius Kubilius said in his message of support to the German Ursula von der Leyen at the head of the EU Executive.

I know, with one Lithuanian doesn’t make a summer, nor the enlargement of the European Union. But everything is about being brave and get started. Even though (given the alliance) the hope is nothing but an idealistic project on the vibrating edge of a sword. How long are we going to keep the balance ...? you can find out about it in the sixth edition of the Newsletter.

My mandate and that of the government is to win something for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova

Nicu Popescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova

The foreign policy is probably the most monitored field, but also most criticized both by the supporters of the new Power in Chişinău and by those who treat it skeptically. The reasons for this increased interest are diverse - from the long-standing geopolitical factor invoked on all occasions in the public discourse in recent years to the legitimate concern about the composition and the dissonances within the governing alliance. For though firm in its internal actions, it is more than eclectic in its external positioning.

A recent example is when, almost in parallel, the Foreign Minister meets with NATO officials, and the President returns to the issue of the country's permanent neutrality ... The situation doesn't appear to affect the new Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration who, having an impressive international experience behind, has set himself the task of propelling, at least by one more step, the Republic of Moldova at the international level. So, in just one month after taking office, the ministry became vocal, and - thanks to the intense interaction of the new minister with senior EU and US officials - also the country as a whole. And with this we can already talk about the first successes, such as the unblocking of



Brussels, 15 July 2019. After meeting with Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

assistance programs for the Republic of Moldova by Brussels.

The European integration remains the red line of the Moldovan foreign policy, Nicu Popescu assures us, "The Republic of Moldova is firm and irreversibly anchored in the European space ...". To what extent he as a

minister, the institution he is leading and the governmental team he represents will succeed in not deviating from this path, in the conditions of a fragile and ... quite "delicate" political alliance, we are going to see already in the autumn. For, no doubt, the local elections will bring forward also foreign policy issues. For

now, however, we propose to see a retrospective of the main statements made by Nicu Popescu in his capacity as head of Moldovan diplomacy which are setting the main lines of conduct and action for the next period.

About unblocking the EU financial assistance

Last year, the European Union suspended the financial assistance for Moldova due to the cancellation of the Chisinau elections, and today, on 15 July 2019, the EU announced the unblocking of this assistance. It has happened in a record time and it is obvious this decision is part of the process of relaunching the relationship between the EU and the Republic of Moldova. And it is also a sign for the support of the reforms process launched in Chisinau, especially in the fields of anti-corruption and de-oligarchization. This first tranche of €14.5 million is proof of the EU's support for Moldova and of the EU confidence in the measures already taken by the new government. It aims also at encouraging the successful implementation of the reform agenda of our country.

My mandate and that of the government is to win something for the Moldovans in the good relations with Germany, Brussels, the United States, and Russia; it is our mandate - to have external relations that bring benefits to all citizens of the Republic of Moldova through the foreign policy that we are implementing.

About the relationship with the European Union entering a new stage

At the invitation of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs

and Security Policy, Federico Mogherini, on July 15th, I had a meeting in Brussels with the EU Foreign Ministers. During the discussions at the EU Foreign Affairs Council I presented the current situation in Moldova, the reform programme and the foreign policy priorities of our country. I asked my counterparts in the EU for support in the implementation of the Association Agreement, in the recovery of stolen money from the Moldovan banking system in the context of the massive bank fraud, but also in boosting the cooperation with the European institutions and the Member States.

The answer was a positive one, which means that the attitude of the European Union towards us has already changed in this new political and geopolitical context. Our mission is to strengthen the relationship between Chisinau and Brussels, so that the European integration is not just a slogan used and abused by local political actors, but a process that turns into actions that citizens can feel. Because, through our relationship with the EU, people export goods to Europe, create jobs, pay taxes and salaries. Without access to the European market our country and its economy cannot exist ... The fact is the Republic of Moldova has to do its homework, and for us the number one priority is to solve these problems because of which the country was not taken seriously and has been isolated from the European space. That is the only way we can respond better to the wishes of citizens who want Moldova to be a fairly governed state, without corruption, without antidemocratic abuses and oligarchs. This is the stake of the entire foreign policy of our state.

About the Partnership with the Socialists and the Association Agreement

The Coalition Agreement in Chişinău explicitly mentions the fact that the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Parliament, and the Presidency continue to implement the country's external and international commitments, including the Association Agreement and the agreement that Moldovan citizens can travel without visas to the European Union. This is our geography, this is our history and no political force in Chisinau can revise these ties that are binding us with the EU, because, without access to the European market, the Republic of Moldova would immediately collapse and this is a reality which will condition the political behavior of all political forces in the country. Regardless of the preferences of some or other political parties in Chisinau, the Republic of Moldova lives in a very clear economic, geographic and political context. The foreign trade statistics shows that 68% of the country's exports are heading towards the EU, while Romania is our biggest trading partner. With such a commercial dependence, any accountable political party, government, any political player cannot stand in the way of cooperation with the EU and in the way of stronger anchoring of the country in the European space.

About the status of permanent neutrality and the risk of federalization

The Republic of Moldova is a neutral state according to the Constitution. No previous Government has revised this status, nor is the current Government

going to review this constitutional status of the Republic of Moldova. So in this sense, the situation has not changed. The recognition or non-recognition of this status of international neutrality have been previously discussed, but the reality remains that the Republic of Moldova is a neutral state according to the Constitution and this is not changing.”

As far as federalization is concerned, the discussion is very theoretical. More than half of the government is categorically against federalization. Even PSRM and President Dodon said they don't intend to revise the previous agreements and understandings to which the Republic of Moldova is a party. Therefore, they don't want to revise the Association Agreement with the EU and they will not even ask to get back to the federalization talks. Another thing that makes me quite calm about these risks of federalization is that society, the public opinion, is very negative about this idea. Over 80% of citizens do not want federalization - so there is a very strong constraint as to the margin of maneuver of political parties.

About restoring dialogue with Russia

On the surface, the Moldovan society seems divided in the field of foreign policy - a large part of our fellow citizens would prefer a rapprochement with the Russian Federation, another part favours European integration, but one thing that unites all these citizens is the desire to have good and stable relations, for the benefit of the Republic of Moldova, with all our external partners: with Russia, with Ukraine, with Belarus, with the European Union, with the United States and obviously with Romania.



Moldova is already irreversibly anchored in the European economic space. It is the one country that benefited the most from the Association Agreement and free trade access to the EU.

In this respect, one thing that unites this coalition and this new government is this desire, on the one hand, to continue Moldova's rapprochement with the EU and, on the other hand, to normalize relations with the Russian Federation. This also means unblocking the economic relationship with the Russian Federation, ie accessing the markets in the East. It is very important for our fellow citizens, especially for the agricultural producers, because the possibility of exporting means their welfare, our ability to create jobs, to attract investment. In this sense, any normalization of our external relations strengthens the edifice called the Republic of Moldova and its ability to modernize and become more prosperous.

About Romania as an anchor in the European space

With Romania we have a privileged relationship, a common history, a common language. In addition

to reiterating these relations, it is important to work on several practical dossiers, both bilaterally and on the EU-Moldova relationship. At bilateral level, we have a common interest in accelerating the construction of the Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline, which is already linked to the gas pipeline system in Romania, a delayed project. It is essential to accelerate it as far as possible so that the Republic of Moldova has alternatives and ensures greater energy security. Other projects are related to the development of roads, but also to the possible construction of several bridges across the Prut so that we can facilitate the movement of goods and people.

There are even more bilateral assistance projects of Romania for the Republic of Moldova in the field of education and culture. After all, Romania is our main trading partner and our way to the EU. It is, therefore, a strong relationship that contributes to the modernization of the Republic of Moldova and will allow us to further anchor the country in the European space.

Editorial

Waiting for justice and ... for the critical mass to produce change

Viorica Zaharia,
*Chair of the Press Council, editor-in-chief of
Moldovacurata.md portal*

Three years ago, I used to regularly attend court hearings in a corruption case, the defendants being two trade union leaders. Every time there I used to meet a witness in the legal case who was at the same time being tried in a civil case, at the same court. And she used to attend the meetings in that case too ... The situation in question allowed her to compare the behaviour of the judges and to tell me someday: "How different the magistrates are! Here, in the criminal case involving two corrupt people, the judge (with almost ten-year experience in the system) seems absent. He looks into the computer during the hearings as though he doesn't see and hear us, while the court reporter writes. And there, in the civil case, I came across a totally different judge... When he does the hearing, he listens to us, takes notes, interrupts us and puts questions, and asks for clarifications whenever something is unclear to him. He hears us! I see him involved. And I hope he is going to judge by law..."

I checked who the "good" judge was. And I was right. He was young, having been worked as a judge for only two years. I knew that young, well-trained and good-faith magistrates had been coming into the system lately. I saw them still enthusiastic and, like those in the movies, they had the ambition to truly do justice to people. But I was wondering, with the scepticism of a journalist, how long was that judge going to be like that?

In another trial, starting with 2014, I used to attend one sitting after the other, in the same court, within a criminal case in which a former minister from the communist times was tried for abuse of office. The damage was of about two million Lei of public money, which had entered the family company accounts for services that no one needed. When the judge- also the president of the court- first saw



me he asked nervously: "Why is it so much interest in this case? Who sent you here?". I suddenly felt uncomfortable, having to explain to the magistrate things that seemed to me obvious: "Well, it is a state-owned enterprise and it is natural for the press to follow how the former civil servants, accused of having caused damage to the state, are penalized." "How do you know he is going to be penalised?! Do you already know the verdict?! "

Finally, the judge became quiet and I had no problems attending the following meetings. The prosecutor who was handling the case was barely greeting me. Initially, he did not even want to make statements for my article, saying he would comment only after the verdict, being quite convinced he was going to get a sentence for the former minister ... I thought he probably wanted to win the case without much fuss in the press, especially that he possessed conclusive evidence... However, one day, somewhat affected, he called to ask me to come to the next hearing and told me he had the feeling the defendant was going to be cleared on the charge. While having the press in the room, the chances were higher that the judge

would feel embarrassed to pronounce an acquittal, when the criminal act was so obvious. And yet, the case resulted in an acquittal. The judge noted in the document that the public interest was not a concrete injured party, and because it was not known to whom exactly the damage had been brought, the person was acquitted.

Why am I telling you about these two people now? The first thought I had after the “fall” of the old Power, and with it the reactivation of the hope to see real justice in the Republic of Moldova, was precisely about the judge who could hear the parties and the prosecutor who saw his work being trampled upon, but was doing his utmost to get a conviction sentence for the corrupt. I immediately asked myself, “Are they both still working in the system? Have they not been compromised in the meantime, and have they had the patience to resist until the “good days” of justice? How many like them are still working in courts and in prosecutor’s offices?” As I was really not doubting about their good faith and desire to do professionally their work.

Victor Munteanu, director of the Law Programme of the Soros Foundation Moldova, was saying some years ago that the justice reform in our country, for which the European Union has given so much money, has failed. One of the reasons - there is no critical mass of people to produce change and oppose the system. I agreed with him then and I agree with him also today, unfortunately. Why unfortunately? Because now, the chances of change are greater than ever. But the critical mass is still missing.

The big fear is that there is no core of integrity professionals. Professionals do exist and people of integrity too. But professionals of integrity are almost impossible to be found. A first sign that, unfortunately, I am right when I doubt that we have the luxury of finding the right people, is the public contest for hiring the head of the General Police Inspectorate. Some contestants are known as having been part of the system that we want to demolish, while others stand out by their properties which are a bit too expensive for the public functions they used to have ... In addition, selecting old heads for new functions would not be well-understood by the public who don’t want to hear any longer about exponents -camouflaged or declared- of the former government which is totally compromised.

The new leadership is, of course, in a delicate situation. Total lustration cannot be achieved – neither the international experts recommend it. At the same time, if compromised people remain in the institutions we expect to be cleaned, the public confidence and the sustainability of the changes is also going to be compromised. And yet, a lustration - let’s say, partial - would be necessary. The Kroll 2 report which was kept secret for so long and published at the beginning of July, shows that there exist people not only who have to be judged for what they did, but also those who would deserve “lustration” for what they did not do. Anyone who had access to the relevant information about money flows, who suspected (it is enough!) there were unclear transactions and did nothing, should also be held accountable. Beyond the criminal penalties, it would have been good to have that law on ministerial responsibility that Parliament didn’t adopt, even though they were waving with it during the Communist rule (2001-2009) and also during the Filat government. The draft law in question - which last appeared in the Parliament database in 2011 as a proposed but withdrawn draft law - provided that ministers could be held accountable for their own deeds but, under certain conditions, also for the deeds of their subordinates in such situations in which “being aware of the illegal actions of his/her subordinates, the Minister did not take the necessary measures”.

Turning to the urgent needs of the moment, we get back to the justice system, which does not mean just courts. No one can generate an ideal recipe for cleaning a system of 400 judges and of about so many prosecutors in addition to the officers of the National Anti-corruption Centre. Each case has to be evaluated so you can make a decision and you cannot restore justice through injustice. Now, more than ever, the authorities need vision, cool heads, and a concrete plan to rehabilitate the system, and, above all, to re-evaluate the institutional elites or the false elites.

Whether we like it or not, whether the governors like it or not, the test of justice remains the most important test of the political power in Chisinau, whatever it is or will be. It is probably the greatest expectation of society and the latest events have shown that if you do not honour this social contract, sooner or later you are doomed to leave.

The card castle which is rapidly collapsing shows how fragile the system is...

Paul Ivan, Senior analyst with the European Policy Centre

The speed of the political events in Chisinau from this summer surprises not only the local analysts, but also the outsiders who follow the developments in Moldova. Changing the Power that, although we all understand it was not infallible, did not seem ready to go “fast and now”; the launch of processes aimed at improving the social, economic and political life, but especially the justice system; bringing the country back on the international partners’ agenda and reanimating the dialogue with the European Union, including the release of financial assistance... The speed and intensity are so impressive that many people are wondering whether they are real, and ... how long they will take. These are legitimate questions taking into account the fact that the new government is made up of two political parties that few would have imagined them in one political “boat”.

How is this “boat” seen from outside and what are its real chances to succeed and produce qualitative change in the Republic of Moldova? How do the developments in Chisinau fit into the regional context and what is the role of the great Powers in what the diplomats call “peaceful transfer of power in the Republic of Moldova”, while the journalists refer to as “the ambassadors’ revolution?” I have discussed about all these at the end of



June with Paul Ivan, Senior Analyst with the European Policy Centre in Brussels, whose speciality topics include also the Republic of Moldova. The diplomatic experience gained in the Romanian Foreign Office is of help to him, likewise the time during which he worked for the European External Action Service and was involved in the negotiation of the Association Agreements with Tbilisi and Chisinau.

Each of the three capitals had its own position which, in this case, happened to overlap

■ **Mr Ivan, this meeting happens at a distance of exactly five weeks since a previous meeting of ours – both now and then it is to discuss about the Republic of Moldova. However, the starting point in both discussions is more than different. How predictable was the alliance between the PSRM and the ACUM - and how predictable was the fall of PDM? Today in Chisinau – half seriously, half joking -they are saying the film with**

Commissioner Cattani is a lullaby compared to what is happening in our country...

■ Also for us the developments in Chisinau were surprising, especially their speed, but at the same time, that was a possible theoretical variant. There were only three big parties and, as a result, only a few possibilities to make the government, and what

we have today was one of them. A possible collaboration between PSRM and ACUM was being considered... The fact that it took the PDM Government about one week to leave has created a series of tense moments, but things have eventually settled. It remains to be seen now what is going to happen after the departure of PDM from the government- when its leaders have left the country and other key people in the party lost their influence- especially in the structures that have been controlled by them in recent years. It is naive to think that it is going to be easy to reform these institutions, to change this system not only at the top, but also much deeper. For there were many people who supported the regime and even took advantage of it. At the same time ... we see it how fast this card castle is collapsing which shows how fragile the relationships or the things on which this system are based were. In fact, many people did not like it and conformed only because their jobs and wages depended on that.

■ ***For me the future of this party became clear when the former Prime Minister Pavel Filip announced they were going to give upon the luxurious party office for the reason the party could no longer afford it. And so will happen with the people who were "loyal", just because... they were made ... loyal. In this context, what has been said about what the American Ambassador told Vlad Plahotniuc as to determine him to capitulate in just ten minutes?***

■ I haven't been at the PDM office that day, nor did I attend the meeting of the two. From a legal and procedural point of view, things were clear: two parties that have the majority in a legitimate and democratic parliament have decided to form a government. As a result, the previous Cabinet had to leave. But Mr Plahotniuc and his allies have tried to oppose that logic... That is why there were very clear positions on the part of the European Union, the United States and even the Russian Federation: when you no longer have the majority and have no more support, you should leave. I suspect exactly these rules of the game were reminded by Ambassador Derek J. Hogan to the former Democratic leader. In addition, the United States, but also other countries, are not going to support a government that does not have legitimacy.

■ ***And yet, the feeling of unnatural persists - personally, I have not digested yet the idea of Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu sharing the government ... And here, I would like to ask: what are the chances of this government? And what are the risks they are running in case those who say there was a deal between the EU, the USA and Russia prove true?***

■ Sure, it's not a natural alliance in many ways, but it's not a deal either. Their positions have simply coincided. The reasons why each of the three parties supported this change are not the same,

but they partially overlap. Regarding Russia, we know that the relations with Mr. Plahotniuc were very tense, although their cause remains unclear to me... And it is strange for me to see Dmitri Kozak talking about things his own country does not respect, but anyway, I do not think it was a deal - each of the three capitals had its position which, in this case, happened to overlap. But the decision was made in Chisinau - two political forces agreed, surprisingly for many Moldovans, but also for many people from the outside. Otherwise, I'm realistic. It is clear that PSRM and ACUM have allied not because they have common visions and values, but to destroy the Plahotniuc regime. Hence, the many questions that arise about how solid this government is. There are legitimate concerns, because it was not an alliance resulting from open and transparent negotiations. And, above all, it is unclear whether the new Government will succeed in reforming the state, being supported by a Socialist Party that is not necessarily known for its reform efforts...

It remains to be seen how functional such an unusual alliance can be

■ ***... And who supported, in one way or another, the Plahotniuc regime, benefiting fully from it. In this context, how do you explain that the Socialists were happy to have only a few positions in this Government - Defense, Information and Security Service ... It would seem they are not interested in economics or education, but what are the guarantees that one day they may not come up with a new initiative to remove the Romanian History out of the textbooks?..***

■ I said it earlier: there are quite a few issues in which the two political entities are not on the same wavelength and which can generate potential conflict situations - history, foreign policy, identity issues. That is why, I think, at

least for a while the two sides will avoid these issues. In the field of foreign policy, for example, I can see an agreement was reached that the Socialists will continue the implementation of the Association Agreement and the development of relations with the European Union. At the same time, they will, obviously, want to develop economic relations with the Russian Federation. And I expect that President Dodon will continue to have his own initiatives and to travel to Moscow almost every week. So it remains to be seen how functional such an unusual alliance can be.

■ ***Speaking of foreign policy, Minister Nicu Popescu, a descendant from academia and research, is assuring us that the orientation remains pro-European...***

■ He is one of the best foreign policy specialists in the Republic of Moldova, and the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration has become more vocal is proof of his professionalism and abilities. Mr Popescu has worked in the European Union, has the necessary contacts that are built in time and that cannot be developed overnight. The fact that he had the support of his European and American counterparts from the beginning is a good sign. Obviously, not everything will depend on him, it is going to be very much about what is happening in the Republic of Moldova and how much the government manages to do. After all, there are limits to what you can sell outside: you need to have a full reform basket and a credible reality in the back that you can communicate.

■ ***I understand that the people in Brussels are not constantly watching the Republic of Moldova, and yet, isn't there an invigorating feeling about Moldova? For instance, we have felt that the messages of the European Union have become clearer and more optimistic through the fact that discussions about the release of***

financial support, but also about other things, have been resumed.

■ Yes, I would say that a little revival was felt, which is due, in the first place, to the change in Chisinau: a new government that has clearly announced it intends to foster relations with the EU and to find solutions to the problems that de facto led to the blocking of funding, has also generated signals of openness from the EU. The next steps, however, will depend on the internal developments in the Republic of Moldova.

■ ***To what extent should we be concerned about the new composition of the European Commission after the European Parliamentary elections?***

■ First of all, I would like to mention that we have a clear pro-European majority in the European Parliament, even though the legislative forum is more fragmented - the Greens and the Liberals have strengthened, while the Popular Europeans and the Socialists have fallen – despite the fact that the populist Eurosceptics have increased by a few seats. As far as the Republic of Moldova is concerned, the EU's position towards Moldova will not change fundamentally. On the contrary, I expect more continuity, based on the existing Association Agreement. The only change that can and should be made is to eliminate the shortcomings that have damaged the relations and have led to the suspension of European funds, which could lead to an increase in the EU aid and even the development of new areas of cooperation. What matters most - and I will repeat this insistently - in the EU's relationship with the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia or other states is precisely what is happening in those states, how functional they are and how many efforts they make. Sure, the European Union is interested in the Republic of Moldova, which is a direct neighbour, and the latest interactions between officials from Chisinau and

the EU prove it. But the intensity of any relationship depends on what the other actor does.

For the Republic of Moldova to have European perspective, it has to become a real success story

■ ***How do things look from a regional perspective? The elections that took place and others that are going to take place in Ukraine, the change of power in the Republic of Moldova, Andrei Nastase's vote at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which has somehow strained the dialogue of Chisinau with its eastern neighbour, a president who did not give up on his statement that Russia has the right to Crimea ... What to expect?***

■ The European Union has been developing bilateral relations with each state in the region – for ten years, through the Eastern Partnership - and is interested in advancing reforms, strengthening the rule of law, reforming the justice sector and fighting against corruption. In this context, good relations between the states themselves are essential. There are sensitivities between Moldova and Ukraine obviously, but there are also possible connection points that can be and should be developed. Ukraine is an important neighbour of the Republic of Moldova, and Chisinau should be interested in developing good relations with Kiev, especially as the Transnistrian issue is in the middle. Sure, there are things that irritate, such as the vote in PACE or President Dodon's previous statements, and thus the Republic of Moldova sent contradictory messages between what the president said and what the government did. I do not think that, in the meantime, Mr Dodon has revised his stance on the Crimea. But he should at least give up on the totally unconstructive attitude that violates the

international law. These “adventures of support” of Russia at the expense of the Moldovan direct neighbour are not good for the country. You need to understand the sensibilities of your neighbours and manage them professionally.

■ ***And if it is to refer to our western neighbour..., why did Romania hesitate to recognize the new government in Chisinau? Is it because of the PDM-PSD relationship?***

■ I think it is more than this relationship, although Romania has been rightly criticized for mumbling about the situation in Chisinau. Especially since Teodor Melescanu's statement went in a completely different direction than that of the European Union. But, ultimately, the official position of Bucharest was one of support for the decisions in Chisinau. Hence the assumption that it was more in the middle than the PSD, PDM, Plahotniuc and other alliances. I would rather say that Bucharest had some legitimate concerns related to the fact that Romania sees Russia a little bit different than Chisinau does. Similarly, Romania takes into account President Dodon's repeated anti-Romania declarations, and certainly there is not much enthusiasm in Bucharest to see key figures such as Zinaida Greceanii, who were among the heads of the communist regime when there were difficult times in the relationship between the two states on the Prut - as it was in 2009, for example. After all, there are important things for Romania and its national security perspective. Perhaps in Chişinău, Mr Dodon appears to be a politician who says a lot, does little and should not be taken seriously. But Bucharest may see things in a little bit different way- taking them more seriously than the euphoria that “we have escaped from Plahotniuc.” And the fact that Igor Dodon takes over, in one way or another, the force institutions raises some questions, like: What is going to happen to the cooperation with

the Security Service? What is going to happen to the military cooperation? Is not all secret information now freely circulating in Moscow? So, I suspect that was the reason for Romania's hesitation.

■ ***How would you qualify the Romanian Presidency of the European Council ending on June 30th? And what is Romania's voice going to be in the region and at the European level?***

■ It depends on how you look at it. Technically, the results are decent, as negotiations and closure of several legislative files that were in progress have been successfully completed. There was also a favourable context in the last months of the European Parliament due to the desire on the part of the other states to finalize the "ripe" files. At the same time, if we look at a general context related to the political framework, to the image of Romania in the EU and to the expectations or the potential of this presidency, I would say that we have failed or, at least, the opportunity has not been used completely. Romania was preoccupied with Liviu Dragnea and with how to avoid sending him to jail, which has developed a conflict with the European institutions and led

to anti-European and even xenophobic messages, which did not contribute to the image of the country in the EU. On the contrary, Bucharest seemed to be heading in the direction of Hungary and Poland, in a group of problematic states. This has been partially avoided in the end, after Mr Dragnea's arrest. Therefore, yes, we are talking about decent technical results. But it has been a failure to capitalize on an opportunity that appears once in 14 years and which would certainly have given us the chance to position ourselves differently, to improve our image, to convey a different kind of message to Europe than the one that we are still a state with various problems.

■ ***Since you have mentioned about the tenth anniversary of the Eastern Partnership, there have been talks over the past few months about the need to rethink it a little, to redefine it, to re-, re-... Is there any chance to change this neighbourly approach to accession?***

■ Not in the short term. It is enough to look at the general context of the EU, the existing problems and the issues that concern the European leaders, and then at their positions on the relations

with our neighbours, so that we can see that there is not too much appetite for enlargement. For many different reasons – but this is the starting point anyway. Even with the enlargement in the Western Balkans there are delays which have to do with both the developments in the respective countries and the internal problems of the EU. At the same time ... the European Treaties make it very clear that, in order to become a member of the EU, a certain country must be in Europe. Both the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are in Europe, so there are no legal prohibitions not to have this European perspective. If the Republic of Moldova becomes a functioning and prosperous state, also the change of attitude will come from the EU. Therefore, in order to have this European perspective, the Republic of Moldova should truly become a success story.

■ ***We hope it will happen, at least from the second attempt. Thank you for the interview.***

***Sorina Ștefăruță
Brussels, 28 June 2019***

Expert opinion

Dionis Cenușa: “Anti-oligarchic spring” or temporary illusions in Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia

The political transformations from Chisinau brought the Republic of Moldova not only on the agenda of the international chancelleries, but also to the attention of the analysts, who seemed to be already bored with the comfortable “stability” that didn’t generate any progress for the country. The change of Power and its first actions are being carefully monitored, and the experts didn’t hesitate to give them an appreciation even from a comparative perspective. We propose, in the given context, the analysis signed by Dionis Cenușa for the *Info-Prim Neo*, according to which the events in our country are complementing the regional tendencies in the Eastern Partnership.

Dismantling the oligarchic regimes, the driving force behind restructuring of the political scene

The eastern neighborhood of the EU undergoes major democratic transformations, the irreversibility of which requires verification over time. In both Ukraine and Moldova and Georgia, the anti-oligarchic rhetoric is the dominant element of political change. In Ukraine, the newly elected president Volodymyr Zelensky promised the renewal of Ukrainian policy (*Guardian*, 22 April 2019), which also meant the distancing of the governing act from



the influence of oligarchs, active during and before the presidency of Petr Poroshenko. The establishment of a (anti-oligarchic) (geo)political coalition in Moldova has led to the abandoning of power by the Democratic Party. Dismantling the old oligarchic regime subordinated to Vladimir Plahotniuc became the driving force behind the restructuring of the political scene (*IPN*, 17 June 2019). Concurrently, in the southern part of the Eastern Partnership, the political crisis in Georgia puts enormous pressure on the existing oligarchic system. Excessive tolerance of Georgian government to the presence of Russian politicians, followed by violent repression of protests, united the dissatisfaction of civil society and of the opposition with Russian occupation, and with the dependence of political decisions on the plans of the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili (*OC-media*, 28 June 2019).

The political rebellion against the oligarchs has been caused, on the one hand, by the continuing expansion of oligarchic

influence from the civil, political and economic freedoms of the other parts of the “social contract” - opposition, business environment, civil society, citizens. And, on the other hand, the intensification of external conditionality and the dynamism of citizens’ demands through transferring the political surveillance on social media have collided with slowing reforms, or even their suspension. In addition, the geopolitical factor also deeply, intentionally or

accidentally, marked the power games in the three countries. The EU’s openness to liberal reforms has automatically validated the political candidates and forces dedicated to the commitments to the Association Agreement. Russia’s involvement varied according to country, political context and leverage of available influence.

Transformations garnished with Russian ambitions

In the case of Ukraine, Russian propaganda actively promoted Zelensky’s candidacy. As a result, the discourse about the need for peace with Russia (*Radio Free Europe*, 4 June 2019) replaced the efforts aimed at consolidating the Ukrainian identity and the intransigent positioning of Russia’s aggression.

Urged by the Russian decision-makers, the Socialists created a coalition with the

pro-European forces in Moldova, which helped to overcome the political crisis and subsequently remove the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc from power. Thus, Russia succeeded in eliminating the political actors considered being the reason for the degradation of Moldovan-Russian relations ([Newsmaker, 24 June 2019](#)). Besides the fact that it has brought an unpredictable and destructive political force out of the equation, Moscow has fertilized the ground for the rise of pro-Russian political forces in Moldova.

Russia's ambitions in Georgia depend on the policy of normalizing Russian-Georgian relations, encouraged in 2013 when oligarch Ivanishvili held the post of Prime Minister ([TASS, 8 August 2013](#)). For these reasons, the impact of anti-Russian protests, though an unpleasant aspect for Russia, could generate unobserved benefits at first glance. However, Ivanishvili's step back in returning to the proportional vote and abolishing of any electoral threshold will liberalize access to the Georgian legislature for all parties, including the pro-Russian ones. This could fragment, destabilize, weaken and compromise the Georgian parliament, respectively. The political transformations in the three countries associated with the EU are less revolutionary than those observed in Armenia during 2018, when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan won the absolute majority [has won the absolute majority](#) in parliament (88 out of 132 mandates altogether) and started to dominate the executive. However, the political dynamics in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia seem to mirror a few strands of recent politics in Armenia.

Strengthening institutions as a solution for diminishing the external factor

From a strategic point of view, the Moldovan Prime Minister Maia Sandu chose to fortify the institutions to diminish the Russian factor ([ZDG, 28 June 2019](#)). The intention to focus on economic cooperation with Russia, giving up any kind of artificial political confrontation, dominates the general disposition within

the governing coalition in Chisinau. The same kind of argumentation was proposed by Pashinyan, who prioritizes the enhancement of sovereignty and independence from external actors such as Russia ([Euronews, 8 March 2019](#)). In both cases, actions to counter-act corruption and dismantle oligarchic schemes are favored, as well as the intensification of relations with the EU, which for Moldova means recovery of democratic governance and support for reforms ([RadioChisinau, 28 June 2019](#)).

Coagulation of a political force both at the executive and legislative levels is taking place in Ukraine. President Zelensky wants to create support in the legislature through his "People's Servant", which in early July 21, 2019 ([Radio Free Europe, 20 June 2019](#)) could get over half of the 450 seats in the Council with about 50% of the votes predicted in the polls ([Unian, 14 June 2019](#)). Prime Minister Pashinyan pursued the same outcome when he resigned in October 2018 to trigger elections, where his "My Step" Bloc received over 70% of the votes ([BBC, 10 Decembrie 2018](#)).

Obtaining concessions from the government through protests is a common feature for Georgia and Armenia. Although at a lower intensity than the post-electoral situation in Armenia in 2018, Georgia's anti-government protests have shown democratic utility. Originally caused by the condemnation of the Russian factor, the protests of June 2019 forced Ivanishvili's regime to accept a retreat. Thus, parliament speaker Irakli Kobakhidze resigned ([DW, 21 June 2019](#)), and Ivanishvili accepted one of the major claims of protestors - restoring the proportional voting for 2020 elections or four years earlier than previously proposed ([OC-media, 24 June 2019](#)).

Democratic advancement in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia is still temporary and has to produce tangible results to become the beginning of a real, profound and lasting "anti-oligarchic spring". In Moldova, reforms require systematization. The de-oligarchization of the political and economic systems must involve both curative measures against the effects of

Plahotniuc's regime and the setting of powerful preventive mechanisms that would counteract any oligarchic influences in the future. In Ukraine, President Zelensky must give up the promotion of informal governance through dubious arrangements with oligarchs ([Unian, 21 June 2019](#)). On the contrary, the concern of the Ukrainian President and his future parliamentary majority must be to strengthen the institutions and laws against oligarchic interference. At the same time, after re-introducing the proportional vote and lowering the electoral threshold to zero, political opposition and Georgian civil society have to make sure that the electoral legislation prevents any non-transparent funding of political parties. Otherwise, Ivanishvili will keep political exponents in powerful position, while the Georgian legislature will be penetrated by parties with dubious accounting and sources of funding, including from Russia.

Rather "re-distribution" than revolution

The political regime led by oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc is in continuous decomposition ([IPN, 17 June 2019](#)), and the Democratic Party announces the converting into a "European-style socialist" party ([NewsMaker, 29 June 2019](#)). The Socialists and ACUM coalition uses political authority to intensify the decoupling of institutions from the previous influences of the Democratic Party ([3 DCFTA, June 2019](#)). Prime Minister Maia Sandu, with the support of the majority in parliament, applies tactically the "lustration" policy in order to clean up the system of people loyal to the previous oligarchic regime and to replace them with people with high integrity, based on an open competition. With rapid steps, it is attempted to fight oligarchy and, at the same time, depoliticize the institutions that have shown the most institutional and political support to the former government.

Practically, there is a pressure, within the limits allowed by the law, to open institutions and eliminate those defect exponents that clearly subordinated and facilitated corruption schemes, from

which the oligarchic center has benefited. Thus, in just two weeks from when the coalition took the power, a range of resignations has been registered, including all Constitutional Court's judges, the Anti-Corruption and General Police Inspectorate leadership, Public Property Agency's director and the head of Information and Security Service. New government's critical stake is to dismiss the General Prosecutor Eduard Harujen, whose mandate expires in 2020, and who still resists the public and political pressures (it has already happened).

Another priority is to change the composition of the Central Electoral Commission, in parallel with changing the electoral law to return to the proportional vote. These interventions also intend to simplify the dismissal of CEC members by the parliament and without validation from the courts ([Europa Liberă, 18 June 2019](#)). Theoretically, releasing the prosecutor and CEC from old exponents will allow these institutions to connect to the new political agenda, where the real independence of the institutions prevails.

The peaceful transition of political power, without protests, and the establishment of a government that combines elements of political struggle, technocratic features, and apolitical actors, substantially regenerates the political scene. Maia Sandu and Andrei Năstase mutually counterbalance each other in the Government, while the Socialists moderate the pro-reform zeal of ACUM

bloc in parliament. The shortcomings of the previous governance require the executive to improve the technical aspects of governance, even if it is strongly dominated by anti-Plahotniuc instincts. At the same time, the political rivalries within the ACUM bloc and between them and the Socialists are diluted by the appointment of rather apolitical decision-makers in about a third of ministries (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Ministry of Justice). The process of de-oligarchization has received prematurely the rating of a "revolution". In reality, Moldova is going through a new redistribution of political power, which would not have been possible without the concert of foreign powers, and in particular Russia's strategic calculations. The persistence of the external factor postponed the political emancipation of the Moldovan citizens, which, unlike Georgia, Ukraine or Armenia, are placed on a secondary place. For all these reasons, everything is limited to a power transfer and a process of restoring institutional functionality, and less to a revolution, expressly and openly requested by the public.

The PSRM-ACUM coalition is in a delicate phase of exerting political power because it is mainly animated by the repugnance against the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc. As early as possible, the ongoing de-oligarchization should be transformed into a permanent mechanism for the protection of institutions against all possible oligarchic interferences.

Instead of conclusions...

The peaceful transition of power in Moldova is by no means a bottom-up revolutionary manifestation, but rather a drastic, although of natural character, consequence of the external isolation of the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc. The processes initiated by the new government are aimed at both removing informal influences upon state institutions and repairing the mistakes committed by the previous government.

The political events in Moldova are complementing the regional trends in the Eastern Partnership, where after Armenia in 2018 the oligarchic regimes of Ukraine and Georgia have started to be shaken. However, the diminishing of the oligarchic influence should be a permanent and holistic objective, and in no case a temporary action aimed at a single oligarch. At the same time, together with liberation from the oligarchic influences, the institutions should be reformed and populated with high-integrity and apolitical personnel that could successfully face the political influences of any kind and political colour. Essential system changes need to be made as soon as possible, but necessarily in a transparent and participatory manner, in order to maximize the benefits achievable during the calm period within the atypical cohabitation between the PSRM and ACUM.

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Foreign Policy Association (APE) is a non-governmental organization committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country Europeanization. APE was established in fall 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public personalities and former senior officials and diplomats, all of them reunited by their commitment to contribute with their expertise and experience to formulating and promoting by the Republic of Moldova of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy.



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