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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



September 1st marked the sixth anniversary of the provisional application of the Association Agreement with the EU and of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. In a brief assessment made on this occasion, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Oleg Tulea, mentioned that “in September 2014 our country began a long journey of rapprochement with the EU”, during which time hundreds of laws were transposed into the national legislation. According to the European documents, 65% of Moldova’s exports go to the EU market, and the state has benefited from significant EU assistance programs. “Our European path is a continuous one. This autumn we will focus on updating the Association Agenda, which will set the reform priorities for the coming years. This period showed that the Association Agreement, implicitly the Free Trade Area, is more than just an agreement - it is an anchor that, despite the constraints inherent to this path, keeps the Republic of Moldova on the path of European integration, reflecting our strategic aspirations for the European integration”, the minister also said.



“Six years ago, together with our friends from the Republic of Moldova, we embarked on an ambitious but promising path, said, on the same occasion, HE Peter Michalko, Ambassador of the European Union in Chișinău. Since then, thousands of products from the Republic of Moldova have reached the EU standards, becoming of higher quality and thus being more and more present on the EU market. At the same time, with the help of millions of euros earned from exports, tens of thousands of jobs have been created in the country”. He also emphasized that “efforts are needed in areas such as the rule of law and justice - for the state institutions to be at the service of citizens - but also to meet EU standards in new areas, such as the quality of food of animal origin, so as to attract even more investment, to increase exports even more”. “Through our development and assistance programmes over the years, the European Union has shown its friendship and solidarity. We will continue to stay with you, because we are confident in the European vocation of the Republic of Moldova and, especially, in the right to a better life of its people”, concluded Ambassador Peter Michalko.



Dumitru Socolan and Dan Neculăescu, secretaries of state in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Chișinău and Bucharest, led a new round of inter-ministerial political consultations. The diplomats addressed several topics of common interest, such as regional security, developments in the Transnistrian conflict settlement and the implementation of infrastructure projects. Dumitru Socolan reviewed the main aspects of the dialogue with the EU, focusing on the state of reforms in key areas and reiterated that European integration remains one of the national strategic objectives. The two officials also agreed on the progress in the realization of joint projects, which target priority areas, such as infrastructure, energy, education, culture. It should be mentioned that the Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure announced recently that the construction works at the Ungheni-Chișinău Gas Pipeline have been completed. The pipeline can provide about 75% of the country’s average consumption or 60% of the average consumption in the cold period of the year (including the Transnistrian region). The construction works started on 18 February 2019, and the estimated value of the project is about 80 million euros.

Independence -29, as a Belorussian OMON bat



Chișinău, 27 August 2020.

The traditional laying down of flowers...

Sorina Ștefârță

On August 27th, the Republic of Moldova marked its Independence for the 29th time. The pandemic has radically changed the format of the current anniversary and perhaps this has been for the better, reducing the once inevitable pathos in an electoral year. But the cancellation of the parades

did not save us from the constant philosophical and already rhetorical question “where did we start, and did we get where we wanted to?” ...

In fact, the questions (existential or not) are many and some of them come with answers from the protagonists of the current edition of our newsletter, Liliana

Palihovici and Alexei Tulbure. They do it without pretending to know the absolute truth. They do it, looking back (sometimes) with anger, at the things that could have happened but didn’t happen, but also with optimism in the future. Maybe that’s still possible?

And we all want to believe that it is possible. ▶

► But ... regardless of age, titles and positions, each of us has his/ her own story for these days of late August - a story through which, most likely, they plan their own future. Mine comes from Minsk, though via Bucharest, and I propose it to you just as it was reported by my colleague Vitalie Cojocari from PRO TV. So, 1 September 2020. Europe.

„... Yesterday was the first day of school in Belarus. The children- from pupils to students- decided to express their dissatisfaction with the Lukashenko regime. They went out in a protest march on the central boulevards. It all ended - as we have become accustomed to - with brutal arrests and beatings. The children (from pupils to students) were arrested right in the yards of schools, high schools, colleges, and forcibly put in 'avtozaks' /arrest cars and taken to overcrowded prisons.

In one of the schools in Belarus, some girls decided to defend their male colleagues. They put the boys near the wall, took each other's arm forming a human chain and hid the boys behind their backs. Again, the Belarusian women looked fearlessly into the OMON's cold eyes. This time it was the Belarusian girls, future mothers, future wives ... Someone was kneeling, with an icon in her hand, waiting for the 'karateli' (from Russian - executioners) and shouting desperately, "Hide the boys, hide the boys!"

Only three weeks earlier, on August 10th, the Republic of Moldova was among the few - and the first - states that, through the mouth and signature of its president, congratulated Aleksandr Lukashenko, the "newly elected" for the sixth time in a row, whose criminal orders are being carried out by the Belarusian OMON.

Aren't we also indirectly involved in this crime? Just a small and innocent bat at the 29 years of independent life of a much too dependent state...

Without the involvement of young people, we will still be discussing the same issues 30 years from now

Liliana Palihovici, president of the „Institutum Virtutes Civilis” Association



After about a decade of experience in politics, during which time she was also deputy speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, Liliana Palihovici says that she returned to where she started - working with people. It is true she did not break away completely from politics - through the association she created, she teaches her fellow citizens **how to be more active and involved, how not to be afraid of the authorities and how to hold them accountable, promoting good governance and the rule of law. And because she has always believed in the edifying power of women, for many years she has been leading the Academy for Women's Leadership, providing training and support to the aspirants to a political position. Read more about the role of women and young people in a society that wants to be fair, about restoring values and resetting the political class as a condition for modernizing the state.**

Moldovans have not yet completely got rid of fear

■ **Mrs. Palihovici, tomorrow is Independence Day. How is it for you, who were in the upper echelon of power a decade ago?**

■ I'm living my life like any other citizen of the Republic of Moldova - with all the worries that these times have brought, with the effort to maintain our health, but also the health of our parents and children. This is the background on which Independence will be marked in 2020. The number one priority is to resist morally and physically - to resist today, so that we can think about the future tomorrow. As for me, this is the thought that has always accompanied me, not only on the eve of national holidays: what else could I do for this country to identify its course, for our children to want to learn at home, and for the families to want to build their homes here.

■ **And did you find the answer?**

■ Unfortunately not yet, although I have been looking for it for years and I'm trying to keep my optimism, to find the arguments that will convince me and others that, look, maybe today it's hard, but I take another step, make effort, find more people who think like me and maybe tomorrow we will change things for the better. Optimism keeps me going.

■ **Anyway, as I wrote not long ago, from a 29-year-old state, as well as from a 29-year-old person, you expect some performances. If we do not find the answer, it means there was no performance. Where were the mistakes? What went wrong?**

■ I don't even know if there are mistakes. Perhaps, rather there are consequences of the way of being of our people, of their mentality and behaviour. It seems to me that Moldovans have not yet completely got rid of the feeling of fear. Fear of speaking out, demanding respect for their rights, being more active and involved. I'm saying this based on the observations from the times I was involved in politics, but also based on some more recent experiences. In the social activities that I'm involved at the moment which aim at strengthening the participatory democracy and good governance, going through districts and villages, I find that people don't believe that if they were more active, more involved, demanded more justice from those who govern locally, but also nationally, things would change. There is a lack of confidence that we can improve our living standards, if we were active. As a result, most politicians in the Republic of Moldova perpetuate a very low degree of responsibility towards the citizens. And we continue to live as we are living ... I understand that a good part of people has lost their hope, others have not even found out that they can live differently and agree to vote for a bag of buckwheat or other minor benefits. Certainly, things will be able to change when there is a change of mentality. But it can only come with a new generation, and

if we do not take care today to instil in the young people the seed of activism and interest in the community life, we will be discussing the same issues - or even about bigger problems - in 30 years since now.

When the society does not react, it means something is wrong

■ **How is the reality seen today, from the position of an activist, compared to the seat of a parliamentarian?**

■ I've actually gone back to what I had been doing before taking the "political break" - working with people, and I never really broke with reality. People live in a kind of despair - we are poor and nothing is possible. We try to prove them wrong. I remember about a village ... "Do you organise village assemblies? I asked them. How many times have you asked the mayor about the budget, the money spent and about who took the decisions on how to spend the money?". I hope that I made them think at least, otherwise they only rely on different statements made by politicians, which they don't even dare to question.

■ **Speaking of statements, just today I heard the head of state saying he fulfilled 85% of his electoral programme, that he promoted the indexation of pensions twice a year...**

■ As a citizen, I would ask him about his merit in this respect, especially the benefit it brought for the people in the situation where he failed to restructure the pension system that would lead to a noticeable increase in the welfare of the elderly. What is the relevance of the biannual indexation of pensions, if now, in the pandemic, out of less than 1000-1500 lei a month, pensioners have to pay eight lei for a mask? We are upset that people don't wear masks, don't disinfect their hands, but has anyone calculated how much this costs for a person who lives on 1500 lei?! The same is true for the school teachers who seem to be sacrificing half their salary for anti-Covid protection consumables ... Because there is no

tradition for everybody to be responsible for their part of the task, nor to care about the image created after the (non) execution of the task. We see a crazy rush for positions without taking responsibility for the position.

■ **Could a saviour help us by inspiring us through his/ her own example?..**

■ The tone of a new approach should be given by the political class, but politicians have already crossed all the permissible red lines so many times, without being penalised by society, that they believe they can perpetuate such experiences indefinitely ... That's why I said things would change when we had a vibrant, active society. That's why I count on young people ... When society doesn't react, it means that something is wrong. The farmers came out to protest, all the others said: it is not our business. Mothers came out to protest about the poor quality of food in kindergartens (fathers could have come out, by the way) - all the others said: it's not our problem. Society is still amorphous; people still do not understand that they can be heard not only in elections. And I strongly hope that through what I'm doing, I will be able to plant the seed of activism which will bear fruit. Although you can't have guarantees.

If Moldovans vote for a woman as mayor, they will also vote for a woman president

■ **What guarantees do the women whom you encourage to enter politics and even teach them how to do it, give you? How simple is this approach in our society, which is essentially a patriarchal still?**

■ Working with women involved in politics is a big challenge, but also (sometimes) a big disappointment. Challenge, because in the three years of the Women's Leadership Academy, which I established, I interacted with the most wonderful women in this country. Disappointment, because I saw situations in which they suffered a great injustice.

They were active, involved, accomplished, worked around the clock and enjoyed the support of the people. And I was very sad to see that sometimes, when making the lists, they were placed on ineligible places from the start. And if they aspired to go further on their own, because no academy gives you the experience of a real campaign, they were obstructed ... This shows that most parties say they have gender equality, that they support it and that they promote women's involvement in politics and in the decision-making processes, but very few parties in reality would have voluntarily adjusted their electoral lists.

■ ***Does it mean that the much-trumpeted gender quotas don't work in reality?***

■ The law obliged the parties to respect the 40 percent quota and the parties complied, because otherwise they were not registered in the electoral race. But the same law has left them a loophole, a room for manoeuvre - in the changes you can make even before the election you are no longer obliged to observe the quota... And the parties have not hesitated to open the door ... cases existed in many districts and it didn't matter that the woman worked the whole campaign and that the people, most likely, chose that party precisely because of her. And she finds out that her place in the electoral list was changed only after the elections... There are gaps that can be bridged by monitoring and we have to put pressure to remove them in the end. And here I will answer the question you asked me earlier: what guarantees do women give me? Women give me the guarantee of more fairness.

■ ***And yet, the idea that Moldovans are not ready to vote for a woman is perpetuated, including by politicians-party leaders- presidential candidates?***

■ If Moldovans vote for a woman mayor in a village, for five or six consecutive terms, I think they are ready to vote for a woman as country president. Yes, maybe at first, she made enemies

because she forced people to take the garbage to a certain place, but in the end, the involvement and the results are appreciated as they change things for the better. Women have shown that they can be fair, transparent, that they care about their village and struggle to bring funds and projects ... When some politicians say that Moldovans are not ready to vote for a woman as president, they probably neglect the importance of this for the prosperity of the country and its democratic development, for a tolerant society in which both women and men are respected and their merits and contribution are equally recognized. Because, in the end, the criteria we should apply to political actors must be fairness, professionalism and performance.

The politicians should stop selling the bear's skin before the bear is killed...

■ ***The pandemic brought many people home, but it seems that those who could have already gone back. Is there a chance to stop migration? And do we need to stop it?***

■ Migration processes are natural in any society, but when they are caused mainly by the moral and psychological state and less by the economic situation of people, things are even worse. The processes can be reversed, because Moldovans abroad are still very connected to the realities at home. They are gone, but they hope that things can be changed and that they will return. But the pandemic will not stop migration - and it was clear to me that now only those in difficult situation, who did not have employment contracts, will return. Others should be the factors to motivate the return home, namely, the fact that your country is changing in the positive direction, that new development opportunities appear, that you can count on a fair justice and a favourable business environment. This is the society I'm hoping to be able to build - one in which everyone can put their ideas into

practice, to carry out their projects for their own benefit and for the benefit of society. People act only they see their own benefit.

■ ***We have to be realistic: autumn will be harder than the summer and spring...***

■ Yes, we may go through a much more complicated period and things can only be changed by a greater degree of responsibility - whether you are in opposition or in power. When they stop selling the bear's skin before the bear is killed and think about the impact of their actions on the life of every human being at the moment, not necessarily in the long run, the society will feel protected. It is an approach that we need to apply especially now, when the pandemic is barely picking up speed. And I remember, in this context, a visit to Sweden about eight years ago. Then, as it is now in the Chisinau Parliament, the parties were in a constant quarrel. In Stockholm, a minority coalition was to approve the next year's budget. Someone in our delegation asked how they manage to do it with a minority government. "But the budget belongs to the whole country," was the answer. We come up with amendments, with some criticisms, but in the end, we are obliged to create conditions for the budget to be voted, because the country cannot function without it". This means national interest and political responsibility - to make minor concessions on things that you cannot assume as priorities today in order to obtain support for important national programmes, which would change tomorrow the way of developing the education, the health sector or the energy sector. We also need such complex approaches and complex changes in all areas of development.

■ ***Do you have any regrets in the sense that you would have wanted to promote something in particular and did not do it?***

■ I think I would have liked more implications and more resources allocated for the young people. I am referring to opportunities created for their

employment and for the development of business and initiatives launched by young people, because, as I said earlier, my firm belief is that the youth brings change. Youth is par excellence the period when you have ideas, but you don't have much money for their realization. The state should create the mechanisms to support and encourage them, only then will they stay here to work, develop and contribute to the prosperity of the country. Another regret is that sometimes, when I had different opinions on certain topics, I should have been more categorical, though in minority. But that was my understanding of acting as a team - finding consensus.

■ *You could have the chance to come back and fix it as coming back is trendy now ...*

■ God help those who return! I am in the right place and I do what I like to somehow influence the development of the Republic of Moldova. I sincerely believed in the possibility of change and democratic development of the country. I did not get involved in politics, being motivated by a public office and I really want all those involved or who will be involved in the Moldovan politics in the future to have the public interest as a starting point and as a guiding beacon. For we can no longer allow things to degrade. For this, however, the society should also be active and react to any deviation by politicians. They should let the politicians know that "we sent you there to work for us, not to promote your own interests!" When the politicians realize that they cannot simply juggle statements and cannot walk from one party to another without being penalised in the elections, the rehabilitation of the entire Moldovan political class will start. And with it, the rehabilitation of the whole society.

■ *Thank you for the interview and I wish you much success!*

Sorina Ștefăruță
26 August 2020

Editorial

Republic of Moldova, a broken state



Victor Chirilă,
executive director of the Foreign Policy Association (APE)

On 27 August 1991, the citizens of the Republic of Moldova achieved what seemed like an unrealizable dream then - the right to sovereignly dispose of their destiny, to build an independent, indivisible, prosperous, democratic and fair state. On 27 August 2020, the Republic of Moldova "celebrated" its 29th anniversary, but, unfortunately, for most of its citizens, it was a sad holiday, full of disappointments. Today, people's confidence in the viability of their state is declining for the simple reason that the Republic of Moldova has not actually become an independent state.

Ideals that have turned into ghosts

The great ideals have not been fulfilled; they have turned into ghosts. The state no longer belongs to its citizens, it is captured by oligarchs, politicians and corrupt judges. The state does not provide people with security, fundamental rights or a decent living. The

Republic of Moldova today has become an instrument of exploitation of many by unscrupulous political clientele, being a drifting wreck led by hypocritical politicians, a broken state territorially, politically, economically, socially and, most seriously, morally.

Citizens believe less and less in the current state's ability to achieve their ideals, and many of them - especially the younger generations - choose to emigrate to foreign countries that can guarantee them a decent future. It is a real miracle that, despite these vicissitudes, the Republic of Moldova still exists as a state.

However, even if the way this state evolves and functions at present does not inspire certainty for its future at all, it is not the time for lamentations, just as it is premature to sing Chopin's Funeral March ... On the contrary, we need lucid and critical thinking as never before to assess the situation and begin to eradicate, step by step, the structural deficiencies of our state. Otherwise, the Republic of Moldova will continue to be the champion in missing the opportunities that the EU offers us through the Association Agreement and the Eastern Partnership, Romania - through the Strategic Partnership and the USA - through the Strategic Dialogue.

From my point of view, the Republic of Moldova cannot be an efficient state as long as its citizens do not believe in it, do not feel protected by its institutions, and the social and civic solidarity are at minimum rates. In fact, a state incapable of providing its own citizens with trust, solidarity based on social equity and, above all, security/protection is doomed to eternal failure and, ultimately, to bankruptcy.

Justice, social and civic solidarity, protection of the citizens

Can we still make the Republic of Moldova a viable state, a state at the service of its citizens, a state capable of fulfilling the ideals that legitimized its birth 29 years ago? Personally, I think this is still possible.

First of all, we should rebuild the citizens' trust in what the state of the Republic of Moldova means and in its

ideals. But this will be impossible to achieve as long as our country is ruled by corrupt to the bones politicians, encouraged by the feeling of impunity. We should therefore urgently clean up the political class and build an effective rule of law, based on a justice system capable of holding politicians and law enforcement officials accountable. Without an independent and fair judiciary that works in the interests of society and the people, we will not be able to restore the trust of Moldovans in their state.

Secondly, it is imperative to build a broad social and civic solidarity around the fundamental ideals of the Republic of Moldova, proclaimed 29 years ago. But this will never be achieved through cheap populism, hypocritical patriotic slogans or chimeras like the civic nation, quarrelled with history and present realities. True solidarity is built on economic and social equity, on economic, fiscal and social policies designed to serve the people and not on a small group of oligarchs and their clientele networks.

And thirdly, the citizens of the Republic of Moldova should feel protected by the state, not enslaved and exploited by it. The state should be at the service of the citizens and not the other way around. This is the case in democratic states, where caring for citizens means an economy that offers them a dignified life; a justice that does them justice, defends them and guarantees their rights; a health system that provides them with safe and accessible health services; an educational system that prepares them for the rigors of the modern economy; a social system that protects them in times of crisis and provides them with fair pensions they can live on, not just survive; policies that guarantee the respect of the rights of ethnic minorities, but also of the national majority, etc.

Protecting its citizens is, in essence, the primary mission of any modern state. Or, if the state does not fulfil this basic mission, its legitimacy and *raison d'être* will *volens-nolens* disappear, and the citizens have every right, in this case, to decide constitutionally their fate. To be or not to be, this is the question.

The contexts in which we have become visible on the world map so far have not been the happiest



Alexei Tulbure, political analyst, diplomat, founder of the Oral History Institute of Moldova

An anniversary is always an opportunity to take stock, whether you do it from an individual position or from that of a state, and often it is honest analyses of the past that can help you better understand what you need to do in the future. About the 29 years of Independence of the Republic of Moldova, the mistakes made or, at least, admitted, and about the future we could build from now on I talked with Alexei Tulbure -historian, political analyst, former Permanent Representative of the Republic Moldova at the Council of Europe (1998-2001) and the United Nations (2006-2008), and more recently - founder of the Oral History Institute of Moldova, through which he aims to collect and capitalize on the testimonies of recent history.

Belarus has become like a litmus test for many of us

■ **Mr. Tulbure, tomorrow is Independence Day. How do you see this 29th anniversary of the Republic of Moldova?**

■ We've had all kinds of Independence Days, including the symbolic but also physical monopolization by the authorities of the National Assembly Square, including holidays marked in the Soviet style or in a traditionalist way... Obviously, the tone this year will be given by the pandemic, but what is clear to me is that we do not have many reasons to be proud, to be optimistic and

enthusiastic anyway. After almost 30 years, Moses is still leading us through the desert, in search of our own identity and vision for the future. The transition has not taken place yet.

■ **Shall we understand that you found Moses?**

■ History and circumstances are for us Moses, history and circumstances are walking us through the desert, trying to transform us into a nation. But we are still on the way, we are yet to free ourselves from the condition of slaves - and I will explain to you why I'm thinking so. This 29th independence is marked against the background of events in Belarus, the only country in the former Soviet Union where there was no transition

to a post-Soviet reality. And here Belarus has become like a litmus test for many of us. I discovered, surprised and even shocked, that in the Republic of Moldova there are many people who do not give Belarusians the right to freedom, who support this last dictator in Europe and the repressive actions of the force structures in this country... De facto, people who enjoy freedoms and rights are ready to deprive other people of the same freedoms and rights, to challenge their right to choose their political power and development path - fundamental things for the democratic consolidation of any state entity. This approach speaks of the fact that we have not changed in the last 29 years, that we have remained supporters of the idea of stability to the detriment of freedom. We are ready to give up our freedom and the right to govern ourselves in favour of an ephemeral stability that a tyrant, clique or clan can ensure for us.

What does freedom actually mean?

■ We, Moldovans, were very good for the imperial project of the USSR - we were obedient and welcoming, all the retirees of the Soviet Army used to come here for the last years of their lives. Independence brought us freedom, but because we had lost our ability to govern ourselves, we were still waiting for someone to come and guide us. Here is the answer to the question: why is Moldova where it is today, and the Baltic States - with which we were at the same level 30 years ago according to the social and economic indicators - are in a completely different world ... You can't be free without taking responsibility for your own destiny - the family, the country, the community in which you live. In these 29 years we don't seem to have understood this yet. Hence all the problems: corruption, economic decline, mass exodus of people, deviations and oscillations in the foreign policy. Because we did not understand that we have a country, that it is ours and that we should build it. As a result, we continue wandering in the desert

in search of a new master - either from Brussels, or from Bucharest, from Moscow or Washington - who will receive us under its wing and tell us where to go and what to do.

Too much is happening at the imitative level - practices, and institutions...

■ **Can the *Ilan Șor* phenomenon be considered a consequence of the search for the master?**

■ At that scale, of course. And I think that what has happened in recent years in Orhei, a traditionally civically active and involved region - when people have refused ideals in exchange for benefits whose source is not only dubious but even criminal, coming from a controversial character, without principles and integrity – that has to be studied still by psychologists and sociologists. These “metamorphoses”, as well as the reaction to what is happening in Belarus today, speak volumes about us. The problem of the Republic of Moldova is not the unstable climate or the fact that we don't have access to the sea - even if (and here I am joking even about dramatic matters) we have one of the largest commercial fleets in the world. The problem consists in people and their mentality. However, with these people, but especially with those who resist these phenomena, we have to try and build our country.

■ **What other mistakes that have not allowed us to move forward have been made in recent years?**

■ I think that during this period, which is more than a generation, we could have educated new people, who are patriots of their own state, but also have a deep civic education, know how to defend their rights, create horizontal solidarity, and oppose authoritarian manifestations. But we chose to do something else ... and I remember in this context an interview with a history teacher from Orhei, currently based in the USA, who said openly that in the 1990s they understood their mission as school teachers very clearly: they were preparing the “generation of the Unification”, supposed to occur peacefully and naturally, because that's what everyone will want.

■ **A strange statement, at least, in the situation where we did not even have a unionist policy at state level.**

■ I would not agree with that one hundred percent. Unionism was institutionalized including though the fact that the “History of Romanians” has been taught in school for several years. And you can't teach the history of only one ethnic group since both in Moldova and Romania live also several other ethnic groups. It is an anti-European approach. At the same time, there was almost no discussion about Holocaust - the physical destruction of an ethnic group in Bessarabia, which is an example of a mass violation of human rights. However, the history of the Holocaust is not considered (still a dominant position in the Republic of Moldova) as part of Moldova's past. So, if we are talking about mistakes, I think that one of them is related to the way the education system was conceived - especially the humanitarian education. The second fundamental mistake is to imitate transformations - effective in the West, but totally inapplicable in our country. We have created institutions that have remained at an imitative level, we have failed to make them lucrative and, above all, independent, so that they function efficiently regardless of governments. All structures in the field of fighting corruption, the Audiovisual and Competition Councils, the Integrity Agency, etc. are forms without content. Unfortunately, this has continued after the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU. That is why these six years that have passed since the signing of the Agreement are, in my opinion, rather a period of degradation of the European idea in the Republic of Moldova. Because, most of the time, we have imitated the approach to EU norms and standards. Yes, there are technical things provided by the Agreement, which have been done, but in the area of fight against corruption and ensuring the independence of the judiciary, in promoting civil society and in everything related to democracy, human rights and the proper functioning of institutions, we have been lagging seriously behind.

■ **You mentioned the “History of the Romanians”. Can we say that there is finally an issue where you have the same point of view as Mr. Dodon? ..**

■ My visions come from a pro-European perspective and when I talk about national history, I rely first of all on a methodology that has been tested and approved in the European democracies - a multidimensional one that addresses history, the past from various perspectives, including of cohabiting ethnic groups. I advocate a humanitarian education that trains people to be able of critical thinking, building their own lives, resisting totalitarian practices etc. President Dodon has nothing to do with this as he is talking about a Moldova that cannot be returned - neither Greater Moldova nor Soviet Moldova.

The statehood is a chance to leave a mark in history

■ **Will there ever be a consensus on the language issue?**

■ Sure, and it is extremely simple when you have recognized that it is one and the same language: either “Romanian” with “Moldovan” in brackets, or vice versa. The rest is political manipulation. In general, it is important that such topics be not used as manipulation tools - the past should be capitalized upon and assumed, not instrumentalized for various purposes. It should contribute to the formation of a contemporary, democratic identity. For example, it's not enough to tell students that on 6 July 1949 more than 35,000 Bessarabians were deported to Siberia, or that in the summer of 1941 alone, more than 50,000 Jews were killed in Bessarabia. There should be created a context for it and explain that that was a massive violation of human rights and that we should build a world where such crimes and atrocities are no longer possible. And for this, you must be able to defend your rights, to show solidarity, to get involved. I believe that through such an exercise we form the democratic identity in the Republic of Moldova. This is also one of the purposes of the Oral History Institute which I created.

■ **Unification with Romania ... could it happen? For example, now, in response to the mismanagement of this pandemic crisis?**

■ In 1992, when the war on the Nistru started, everything seemed so wild and impossible that I thought if the Unification

stopped that absurd conflict, it would be acceptable as a political evolution. But things happened differently, and what the so-called unionists have done in recent years (open collaboration with the criminal oligarchy) has completely discredited the idea. Not to mention the fact that they are talking about Unification the 21st century - an idea in fashion in the 19th century -, ignoring the really important issues for the Republic of Moldova - modernization, development, equality, democracy, etc. I think this is wrong and inefficient, and there is nothing more anti-European. It is true that the unionists today say the Unification will take us directly to the European Union, respectively the pensions will increase and we will have functional institutions. This thing can be attractive and I do not rule out that one day, if we do not wake up and start building a truly democratic state, the idea of the unification will have more and more supporters - precisely from these rational arguments. However, let us not forget that there are about five thousand ethnic groups and peoples in the world, and only about 200 states, and that the statehood is a chance to leave a mark in history. Are we capable of this? The question remains open. Unfortunately, for now, the contexts in which we made ourselves visible on the world map were not the happiest: the Transnistrian conflict, the first country in the post-Soviet space where the communists returned to power, then the stolen billion, human trafficking ... and more recently - the connection, even indirect, with the Beirut explosion.

■ **How do we position ourselves today on the world map?**

■ At the level of the presidential institution, we are completely isolated. Even if he has more symbolic functions, the president can be an additional voice in mobilizing international support for the Republic of Moldova, but the governments accepting him can be counted on the fingers. The situation is being saved a little by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which shows amazing acrobatics, trying to satisfy all the ambitions of Dodon's "balanced politics" and, at the same time, saying the country's direction is towards European integration. Thus, as it has always been in these 29 years, even today there is no consolidated will and a unique vision at the level of the political class ... The

situation is also fragile with the neighbours. The communication with Ukraine is a bit formal. We still have some relations with Romania, thanks to the fact that it helps us in various fields - response to natural disasters, renovation of kindergartens, SMURD etc. It is still promoting us, sometimes not very successfully though, but it's a special discussion here.

■ **The geopolitical factor has always worked well in our case**

■ **You have a special history with Romania, as Ambassador to the Council of Europe you took several harsh attitudes towards Bucharest ...**

■ I admit that the form in which I expressed my position back then - and which is somewhat similar to some of today's reactions of some high-ranking people in Chisinau - was not the most successful. I think it could have been done differently ... I am convinced that we should develop relations with Romania and recognize the specifics of these relations, but, at the same time, we can ask our Romanian friends to reduce the tutelary tone. I am referring, in particular, to the European Parliament - and I remember here the zeal with which a European political group, inspired by the Romanian deputies, defended the Government and the Plahotniuc regime in Chisinau. It was absolutely absurd when they said that it was better to have a corrupt government than one that would give way to the Russian tanks. It is as anti-European a message as the idea of tolerating corruption.

■ **Speaking of tanks and of the fact that we have already entered the election campaign - will the geopolitical factor be used also in these presidential elections?**

■ Most probably yes, because the geopolitical component in our country has always worked well, no matter who promoted it. It may be used to a lesser extent than in previous years, it is possible that this time the main candidates will compete in counting who has more merits in the fight against the mafia. But geopolitics will remain, because it is the shortest way to mobilize supporters. Phobias, the common enemy ... look how well Romanophobia and Russophobia have worked in the past and are still working today.

■ **What are your predictions for the election campaign and its outcome?**

■ It is obvious that we will have two finalists - Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu. At the same time, the division and mutual attacks on the right wing of the political spectrum can have detrimental consequences for the second round. Yes, people act rationally, they care about the usefulness of the vote, but some people may simply not go to the polls - out of anger, disappointed by these wars, especially between PAS and PPDA. Igor Dodon is not in the best situation either - it is clear that he has no longer the massive support of Moscow. I'm pretty sure he won't get that \$200 million Russian loan either, he didn't manage to take pictures with Putin, although he has waited for a week in the woods near Moscow... I don't think the vaccine will save him either. So, it is absolutely clear who will get in the second round. The winner - it remains to be seen.

■ **Getting back to the end of August ... The Republic of Moldova is still on a waterline and sometimes it is not even clear what keeps us afloat. But what could give us a boost, not to mention a kick in the butt that can be a step forward?**

■ The impulse can be anything or anyone. The impetus can be given by a personality, but also by a political force. I will give a concrete example here - Saakashvili's Georgia. He led a revolt, he was the leader of a modernization process and, even if he is no longer in power, things that he laid the foundation for in Georgia, the reforms he has carried out still work. At the same time, I don't think that the return to political life of personalities like Vlad Filat can bring change for the better and... And especially I don't believe in external impulses. Except, perhaps, for a clear, institutionalized perspective of the country's integration into the European Union, combined with a tough mechanism of control and pressure from external partners. As long as you don't have the prospect of access, it's hard to have a horizon.

■ **Thank you for the interview and ... let the horizons appear.**

Sorina Ștefârță
26 August 2020



Expert opinion

Dionis Cenușă: Belarus, a new “velvet revolution” in the Eastern Partnership?



The 29th anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Moldova was consumed against the background of extensive protests that have been taking place for about a month in Belarus. Protests generated by the popular dissatisfaction with the result of the August 9th elections, when Alexandr Lukashenko was re-elected President for the sixth consecutive term. Thus, if the latter remains de jure, de facto, as a way of life and government, the USSR vestige has expired. People no longer believe in him, they want change which, sooner or later, will come. What is happening in Belarus? Are we witnessing a new velvet revolution in perhaps the most frozen country in the Eastern Partnership? This is the question that Dionis Cenușă, researcher and chief columnist, is trying to answer in an analysis signed for the IPN.md News Agency.

Belarusian protesters, trying to find their own way

The concept of “revolution” is missing from the vocabulary of political and civic forces involved in the post-election protests in Belarus. Abstaining from the term “revolution” denotes, on one hand, the caution of protecting the

peaceful essence of the protests, and, on the other hand, the intention in differentiating the Belarusian situation from other political transformations in the Eastern Partnership, in particular, those related to the Ukrainian “Euromaidan”. The Belarusian protesters want to chart their own path, which will ensure not only the

democratization of the country but also the preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity. They are aware of the risk of Russian offensives under a geopolitical pretext, with the indispensable negative implications, which may inevitably occur if the Belarusian protests are branded as a “velvet revolution”.

The political approach built by the opposition and the Belarusian civic groups, capable of self-mobilization, contains two political objectives: the urgent *resignation* of Alexandr Lukashenko *and the peaceful transfer of power following new presidential elections*. The political change, conceived by both the opposition and the variety of civic groups within the Belarusian society, lies in political dialogue and non-violent protests. The primary sources of resistance against Lukashenko’s regime are marches of solidarity and strikes by public sector workers against the electoral fraud and the arbitrary violence by law enforcement. They crystallized a nationwide democratic political and civic movement for the first time in the post-Soviet history of Belarus. Even though the protesters avoid any similarities of their actions with a “velvet revolution”, the situation on the ground proves the opposite. The population attached itself to the idea of democratic changes, which would establish functional political rights instead of ossifying them under the weight of autocracy.

It stepped over the psychological barrier of temporary or singular protests, and the protestant spirit acquired a deep emotional substratum. The deliberate and out-of-necessity violent reaction, abundantly applied by special forces, the secret police (KGB) and the administrations of detention institutions, inspired non-electoral motives within the protest movement. Those about [7,000 people](#) who were arbitrarily arrested during the first days of protests triggered after the fraudulent elections on August 9, include also their families and friends. Theoretically, a minimum of 5 people per protester arrested/mistreated by the state law enforcement shows sincere devotion to the protests against Lukashenko. In reality, the protest spirit covers the whole country, not just the capital Minsk (about 2 million people or 1/5 of the country's population). (...)

The fourth “democratic revolution” in the Eastern Partnership?

Before the Eastern Partnership launched in May 2009, the region was shaken by the “coloured revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine from 2003-2004. As Henry E. Hale explains, the origin of these *revolutions* is “[succession struggles more than democratic breakthroughs generated by civic activists and foreign democratizing activity](#)”. In Niklaus Laverty's view, the “[vital](#)” elements of the coloured revolutions were the organized civil society - Georgia (Khmer/ “Enough!”) and Ukraine (Pora/ “It's Time!”). After the coloured revolutions, starting with 2009, various uprisings in Moldova (2009), Ukraine (2013-2014) and Armenia (2018) brought back into discussion the issue of democratic revolutions. The protest wave in Belarus is part of the same stream of events, where the existing socio-political system gives it unique features. For this reason, the degree of differentiation is higher than the number of similarities between

the anti-Lukashenko protests and the democratic uprisings in the other three Eastern European countries.

Armenia (2018). The Armenian and Belarusian cases have one thing in common - the peaceful way in which the protests take place. Electoral causality is absent from the initial context of the “velvet revolution” in Armenia, but, in any case, the issue of succession persists. As in the case of Lukashenko, after 10 years as president of the country, Serzh Sargsyan tried to retain power. This time, the latter targeted the seat of the prime minister who, thanks to the new Constitution, obtained more extensive responsibilities (2015). It was not the electoral fraud that aroused the discontent of the Armenian public, but the corruption associated with Sargsyan and his intention to perpetuate power by preserving the old system. The rise of the Armenian opposition, led by Nikol Pashinyan, was due to active communication via Facebook. In Belarus, the Telegram is the platform that facilitates interaction between protesters. As in Belarus, protests in Armenia focused on maintaining existing geopolitical parameters. This means both the guarantee of good relations with Russia and the unchanged membership of the Eurasian concentric circles - the Eurasian Economic Union and the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty.

The domestic policy of the countries that are part of these Eurasian structures is perceived as a vital area of Russian foreign policy. That is why, after losing Sargsyan in Armenia, Moscow is careful on the survival of Lukashenko's regime, with or without him. Moscow's readiness to “[do anything](#)” to “provide assistance in resolving the situation in Belarus”, at the request of the Minsk leadership, was announced by Dmitry Peskov, a Vladimir Putin's administration representative. Among the gestures of assistance is the [deployment of a mission of Russian journalists](#), who

replaced the Belarusians ones, who expressed solidarity with the protesters. So, the public information space seems to be the first field that Lukashenko voluntarily transfers, at least temporarily, to the management of Russian specialists, directly controlled and paid by the Kremlin.

Ukraine (2013-2014). Similar to Ukraine, Belarus is governed by a presidential regime. Unlike Victor Yanukovich, however, Lukashenko became a public enemy not for accusations of political corruption, but for blatant election fraud and the use of violence against peaceful protests. Likewise, unlike the Ukrainian “Euro-Maidan”, the language of the Belarusian protests excluded any reference to geopolitics. In the case of Ukraine, the protests have radicalized in response to the brutal violence used by special forces and which has resulted in up to 100 deaths (BBC, 2019). In Belarus, even after the scenes of mass torture and murder, the protest movement remained non-violent. Raising the profile of protesting women has accentuated the peaceful connotations of anti-Lukashenko demonstrations. Civic groups, civil society and the Ukrainian opposition have embraced the title of “dignity revolution”, which aimed at freeing the country from political corruption and bringing it closer to the EU. The Belarusian democratic revolution is in full swing, without being officially inserted in the protest language.

Moldova (2009). Some similarities can be seen between the current situation in Belarus and Moldova in 2009. The protests broke out in an electoral context in Moldova, which favoured the victory of the Communist Party. In the Belarusian elections, the opposition has accumulated multiple pieces of evidence regarding the vote-rigging. This move was backed internationally by the EU, [which refused to acknowledge the result of the Belarusian election](#), including

Lukashenko's victory. The allegations of the Moldovan opposition about the mass fraud of the parliamentary elections were not [confirmed in the final report of the OSCE](#). The latter found, however, various deviations that could have helped the Communists to obtain a majority (60 out of 101 seats). In terms of duration, the Moldovan protests were short (only 2 days). But in just one day, radical groups detached from peaceful protesters, incited by provocateurs, devastated the buildings of the Presidency and Parliament. In the more than two weeks of protests, no significant material damage was reported in Belarus. On the contrary, the Belarusian protesters act in a tidy fashion.

The crackdowns during and after the Moldovan protests left more than a hundred people physically and psychologically tortured in police stations in the Chisinau capital ([Amnesty International, December 2009](#)). The numerous episodes of torture in Belarus significantly exceed the proportions of the Moldovan ones, given that the number of detainees has risen to about 7,000 people. Slogans

about re-unification with Romania and the country's pro-European vocation dominated the geopolitical discourse of Moldovan protesters. In Belarus, there was a visible disinterest in geopolitics, even though the state propaganda categorized the protesters as Russophobes, pro-NATO and Polish-backed. Namely, in Moldova, for the first time, social networks are used for mobilization purposes (Twitter), in the same way as the Telegram channels effectively connect Belarusian protesters in 2020.

In lieu of conclusion...

Thus, despite contextual and causal differences, current events in Belarus meet the nuances of a democratic revolution, similar to those that have occurred in different periods of time in other Eastern European countries. (...)

The most desirable model of democratic revolution would be the Armenian one, but the perpetrators of the Belarusian protests do not have the minimum formal instruments - extended rights to protest unhindered. At the same time, the protesting voices

in Belarus are reluctant towards the Ukrainian scenario, which associates with violence and geopolitical dichotomy, the annexation of Crimea and the military intervention of Russian forces in Donbas. Also, the situation in Belarus differs considerably from the democratic uprising in Moldova, in which there were episodes of violence and excessive geopolitical rhetoric.

Post-election protests in Belarus have started a democratic revolution, albeit not yet openly embraced by its participants. Its first success is the mobilization and solidarity between distinct social categories, which have never before exercised their fundamental rights publicly and collectively. The continuation and the purposefulness of the *Belarusian democratic revolution* depend on several key players - the functionality of the newly created Belarusian political and civic platform (Coordination Council), the survival tactics of the Lukashenko's regime, the implications of Russian interventions and the capacity of using of political, technical, financial and sanctioning levers available in the West.

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