

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

NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

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News in Brief



The Minister of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Andrei Spinu, wrote on December 18 on his Telegram channel that for the first time in the history of the Republic of Moldova, the right bank of the Dniester will not consume gas supplied by Gazprom. He specified that "for the month of December, SA Energocom, according to the decision of the CSE (Commission for Extraordinary Situations - n.a.), will sell 100 million m³ of gas to MoldovaGaz, at an average price of USD 1,108.61/ thousand cubic meters". "This price includes all costs: gas purchase cost, transport costs and storage costs incurred by Energocom. In addition, the Government continues also to increase gas stocks for the coming months", noted Andrei Spinu. He specified that, "following this decision, the tariff will not change", and "citizens will continue to receive support for the invoice". The Extraordinary Situations Commission decided, on December 16, that "Moldovagaz" SA will procure from "Energocom" SA up to 100 million cubic meters of natural gas, in order to provide the Republic of Moldova with energy resources in the context of the reduction in the volume of natural gas supplied by the Russian company "Gazprom".



The President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, came on December 16 with a reaction to the decision of the Commission for Exceptional Situations to suspend, during the state of emergency, the broadcast license of six television stations – Primul in Moldova, RTR Moldova, Accent TV, NTV Moldova, TV6, Orhei TV. "The decision is based on the findings of the Audiovisual Council regarding these stations, which show the lack of correct information in the coverage of the events in the country and the war started by Russia against Ukraine, and comes to protect the national information space and prevent disinformation," said the head of state. The head of state emphasized that, in the uncertain situation in which the Republic of Moldova finds itself, "it is very important to prevent any attempt to destabilize the country". The Commission for Extraordinary Situations has suspended the broadcast license for six Moldovan television stations, during the state of emergency. The suspended stations rebroadcast on the territory of the Republic of Moldova mostly the content of some TV stations from the Russian Federation.



On December 8, the British government sanctioned the fugitive Moldovan oligarchs Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Shor, who are hiding from Moldovan justice. According to a statement from the British embassy in Chisinau, assets owned by Plahotniuc and Shor in the UK or in any of its overseas territories, such as the British Virgin Islands or the Cayman Islands, will be frozen. Also, the two will not be able to enter the UK, and citizens of this country are prohibited from doing any type of economic transactions with them. The sanctions come a few days after Moldovan President Maia Sandu declared, in a speech held at the international anti-corruption conference in Washington, that the Republic of Moldova needs other jurisdictions to work with its law enforcement bodies and that it will make progress in the fight against corruption "when other countries will no longer harbor fugitive criminals and property stolen from other states".

Moldovan European Integration Forum 2022: between EU privileges and Russia's war



The 9th edition of the Moldovan European Integration Forum took place on 13 December 2022 in Chisinau

The ninth edition of the European Integration Forum of the Republic of Moldova, organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), the Foreign Policy Association (APE), in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MAIE), has provided a platform for consistent discussions on all important

topics of the European path of the Republic of Moldova, but also about the volatile regional security situation in which our country finds itself today.

Thus, the speakers concluded that Moldova is in a dual position of a privileged state, but also threatened by the war in its vicinity. The year 2022 was extremely eventful for the pro-European government

in Chisinau which managed to keep the ship afloat in the turbulent waters of the war in neighbouring Ukraine. The latter has caused multiple internal crises in Moldova and only the western assistance has saved Chisinau from collapse.

However, the Republic of Moldova managed, in June 2022, a rare achievement - after

► only three and a half months after submitting the EU accession application, to obtain the status of a candidate country for EU accession. In comparison, some states in the Balkans have been waiting for almost 20 years to become candidate countries for EU membership.

The Republic of Moldova has also benefited from an unprecedented openness in the last decades from the EU which has engaged in new relations with countries in its eastern proximity against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Brussels had to give a strong signal that the European democratic values are above Russia's military force, and the European member-states have accepted that Ukraine and Moldova should receive this status quickly. Despite the difficult conditions, the EU expects from the Republic of Moldova that it unequivocally implements a series of

reforms. Six out of nine requirements refer to the justice sector.

The authorities claim to have met around 60-65 percent of the commitments towards the EU when it was granted the EU candidate status. A first evaluation by the European Commission will take place in June or July 2023, and in the autumn of next year there will be a larger evaluation report of the Republic of Moldova as a candidate country. Currently, the polls show that approximately 50-60 percent of Moldovan citizens are in favour of continuing the European path.

However, the Republic of Moldova remains extremely vulnerable when it comes to the defence sector, where the underfunding of the army in the last 30 years remains a problem. This handicap cannot be recovered overnight, so Chisinau's options are limited – be it receives consistent help from the West in

terms of military equipment, be it makes serious plans to join a military alliance, namely NATO. For this, however, a few “golden votes” should be found in the Parliament to change the article regarding the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova in the Constitution, and this will be a very difficult mission.

In addition to all this, Chisinau needs to quickly resolve two other important issues: energy security, which can be a longer-term project, and the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict starting next spring.

The above and the future plans of the Republic of Moldova depend to a great extent on the outcome of the war between Russia and Ukraine and on who will win this confrontation. Following that the negotiations and peace conditions are important.

Madalin Necshutsu

Moldova's EU candidate status: maximizing existing opportunities and moving towards full integration: priorities and perspectives



“European integration is not a geopolitical choice, but a development model. It is about how Moldovans see their future, about what kind of country and what kind of state they want to build. European integration is not only the future, but to a certain extent also the present of the Republic of Moldova, said Felix Hett, the FES representative in Ukraine

and the Republic of Moldova, in the opening of the Moldovan European Integration Forum that took place on December 13, in Chisinau, and organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Institute for European Policies and Reforms, the Foreign Policy Association from Moldova, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration.



“We see in the future accession to the European Union an additional guarantee for the security of our country. At the same time, it will be much easier for us to fight corruption and crime when we fully benefit from the tools offered by police cooperation or when we can issue European arrest warrants, thus limiting the possibility of thieves to evade responsibility.

Prime Minister Gavrilita emphasized that one of the goals of this government is to strengthen the rule of law. “Our country is at a historical crossroads. It is our duty to use this chance and I am fully convinced that, working together, we will succeed!”, added the head of government.

Priorities, capacities, and risks on the road to the EU

In the first panel of the Forum, the speakers have discussed about maximizing the chances of the Republic of Moldova to join the EU and what exactly is needed to achieve this goal.

The State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, **Vladimir Cuc**, stated that the Moldovan authorities fulfilled

The Prime Minister **Natalia Gavriliță** has underlined in her keynote speech that joining the EU family is a genuine country project, which the current government has the historic duty to complete, after the Republic of Moldova obtained on June 23 the EU candidate country status.

“This new position represents, first of all, a guarantee of the irreversibility of our path to transform the Republic of Moldova into a modern, prosperous, well-governed European state, with a resilient economy and an independent judiciary - an objective of an entire generation, which transcends the temporal limits of a political cycle. For the first time since independence, we have a real country project, which we have a historical duty to complete, for the good of all the people on this planet”, said Natalia Gavrilita.

Prime Minister Gavrilita drew attention to the fact that the Republic of Moldova is facing a series of challenges, including hybrid warfare, incitement to destabilization, the use of energy as a weapon, and misinformation regarding the benefits of joining the EU. In this context, the head of the Executive emphasized the importance of combining the efforts of all those who share the European creed, to convince people

that Europe means development, freedom, security, and solidarity.

Also, the prime minister referred to the need to attract professionals, who have knowledge in public policies and are result-oriented, to involve them in the activities related to the European integration. “We need people who will write, together with us, a new page in the history of the Republic of Moldova”, emphasized Natalia Gavrilita.

She specified that it is important to capitalize on complementary platforms to the actual process, such as the European Political Community, whose summit our country will host next year.





Mantas Adomėnas, Foreign Vice Minister of Lithuania

approximately 60-65 percent of the commitments under the EU candidate country status.

“A first evaluation by the European Commission will take place in June or July 2023, and in the autumn of next year there will be a large evaluation report of the Republic of Moldova as a candidate country, and we hope that in December 2023 we will start the discussions on clear prospects for Moldova’s accession to the EU, said Vladimir Cuc.

“The Republic of Moldova has been knocking on the door of the EU for many years and now the door is open, even if the corridor, that is the path we still have to walk, is quite long,” Vladimir Cuc said.

He has also stated that the Republic of Moldova has new opportunities in the relationship with the EU and is seen in a completely different way compared to one year ago. “It is very important that we use this window of opportunity and move quickly and qualitatively. Internally, there is a sufficiently large public support, between 50-60 percent, for the European integration”, he added.

Cuc explained that the EU has established nine requirements to be implemented by Chisinau by 2023: “There is a plan to achieve them, intensive work is being done on the most important areas - justice and anti-corruption reform, public administration and finances, and human rights. All these provisions relate to the political criterion of accession, which is fundamental for the EU. The challenges faced by the authorities are the multiple crises that consume the resources. The second risk is related to the capacities of the authorities”, he explained.

Windows of opportunities

Mantas Adomėnas, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, has stated that the progress of the Republic of Moldova on the path of reforms is beginning to be seen in the justice reform, the fight against corruption, and the depoliticization of institutions.

“These things are important not only in the process of European integration, but also in restoring the resilience of the state, which is important for the future of the

country. Emphasis must be placed on the implementation of reforms. Lithuania, as an EU member state, supports and shows full solidarity for the Republic of Moldova”, said Adomėnas.

The Lithuanian official also said that the Republic of Moldova is an inspiration for other states and has full support from its EU partners.

“Chisinau should take into account the fact that this opening “is not forever” and should be used urgently and fully, now that there exists this favourable constellation: political will and readiness for the new wave of enlargement in the EU,” explained the Lithuanian official.

The diplomat stated that there are important risks in the region from which the Republic of Moldova suffers - physical war in Ukraine and hybrid war waged by Russia, manifested through energy blackmail, disinformation, security threats, and instigation to riots inside the country.

“Russia’s aggression has forced the government to make tough choices, but the results are impressive. The Republic of Moldova has achieved much more in 2022 in the field of energy security than in the previous three decades”, pointed out Mantas Adomėnas.

He explained that European integration is a long-term race and the effort to democratize and modernize the country should be stable and constant.

Quality above speed

Jānis Mažeiks, the head of the European Union Delegation to the Republic of Moldova, stated at the Moldovan European Integration



Jānis Mažeiks, head of the EU Delegation to Moldova

Forum that the focus of the European integration process should be on its quality rather than speed.

“The government and civil society of the Republic of Moldova have done many good things after the country received the candidate status. The actions and human resources needed to advance on the path of European integration have been identified. Our concern, however, is not so much about the deadlines for the fulfilment of the commitments as about the quality of the process. Better to do things qualitatively than to run for deadlines. We need to find a balance between speed and quality,” said Jānis Mažeiks.

The European official stated that another aspect is the chance offered by a miracle versus the work required to achieve a sustainable result. “Yes, it was a miracle that in December 2022 the Republic of Moldova is a candidate country, because one year ago no one could have expected such a thing. But after this miracle, let’s not forget to get down to business and work hard to achieve results,” the diplomat said.

He specified that, despite the difficulties in 2022 the Republic

of Moldova achieved remarkable results: “An important thing that the authorities should think about, and not only that, is how to have bigger support from society for European integration. It is important to explain and understand that the process of European integration is not for politicians, but for society, to the benefit of every human being. When people really understand and feel this, then there will be a driving force and positive pressure from the people on politics, and only then will European integration be irreversible,” said the European official.

Resilience to disinformation and strategic communication

Angela Gramada, president of the Experts for Security and Global Affairs (ESGA) organization from Romania, stated at the forum that the action plan assumed by the Republic of Moldova as a EU candidate country is a very ambitious, with very tight deadlines, which requires cohesion and collaboration between institutions, which in the Republic of Moldova is sometimes defective. “That’s why one of the most important recommendations is to emphasize this institutional cooperation,” she explained.

Also, the expert specified that the justice reform is the most difficult reform to carry out among those requested by the EU. “Something is changing and transforming, but the path is not easy and there is a risk that some processes may be reversible, as happened in Georgia or other states in the Eastern Partnership, due to internal processes in society,” Gramada declared.

She said that a second recommendation to the authorities is



Angela Gramada, Experts for Security and Global Affairs, Romania

to focus on strategic communication in which both domestic and external partners are engaged. “There is a risk that along the way we will lose citizens who still have reserves, being influenced by populist political forces and previous experiences. The question is why the authorities do not communicate about the positive elements that are happening and why they do not leave Chisinau to go to the regions. Things must be simplified for the public, and political exclusion must be avoided,” she added.

Angela Gramada has mentioned about a series of vulnerabilities in relation to the information space, but this situation can improve if there is a desire on the part of the authorities to communicate what has been done, in order not to leave room for speculation for other actors who have other interests and want to undermine the European course. “There is a need for good communication within the Eastern Partnership. In March we saw divergent opinions - from Kyiv to Chisinau, or to Georgia. These states should show political maturity. If the maturity is not there, this can jeopardise the opportunity for a very good regional cooperation in the future. We have to help ourselves for a better future. We are not making the change for the external, but for ourselves, in order to be more resilient”, explained the expert.

Angela Gramada concluded that all these plans related to change and resilience can be achieved, and this is demonstrated by Ukraine every day, through its firm commitment to resist the Russian invasion.

Internal political consensus and a “Snagov Pact” for Moldova

Last but not least, the executive director of the Institute for European



Julian Groza, executive director of the Institute for European Policy and Reforms

Policies and Reforms (IPRE), **Julian Groza**, spoke about the fact that the decision to grant EU candidate country status to the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia is the response to the war waged by Russia in Ukraine.

“In 2013, we were discussing with the EU the importance of a clear European perspective for the Republic of Moldova. I was then saying to the European officials: “Let’s not wait for a war to start to change your attitude towards the Republic of Moldova, as it was the case in the Balkan countries. But this year the decision came in response to the war, which changed the security context. The good thing is that the EU’s perception of the region has changed and the EU has demonstrated once again how important consistency in values is,” he said.

He also said that the Republic of Moldova took this European road in the context of Russian aggression in Ukraine, but this path also envisages lots of processes that happen in each country. “The speed with which each country advances depends on its own merits and the commitments assumed”, Julian Groza also said.

Julian Groza stated that the Republic of Moldova should continue to ensure quality in the implementation of the reforms undertaken in relation to the EU, in order to provide arguments to be able to open the accession negotiations. “The objective of the Republic of Moldova is to start negotiations for a future Accession Agreement by the end of the mandate of this European Commission - the year 2024. It is important that the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia have always collaborated within the European agenda to help each other. It is necessary that we expand the support framework at the national level for European integration”, specified Julian Groza.

The IPRE director explained that the key to success is for political actors representing communities and parties to have a clear pro-reform and pro-European agenda, evoking the Snagov Pact in Romania, when, in 1995, all political parties agreed on supporting the country’s agenda for the NATO and EU accession. “When the Republic of Moldova has this consensus, the citizens’ support for the European integration will increase,” he concluded.

Justice system reform and the fight against high-level corruption: progress and obstacles



Sergiu Litvinenco, Minister of Justice of the Republic of Moldova

One of the most important challenges and at the same time the thorniest problem remains the justice system reform in the Republic of Moldova. For three decades Moldovan justice has been encumbered by cryptocratic interests and tainted by endemic corruption.

At the European Integration Forum on December 13 in Chisinau, the Minister of Justice, **Sergiu Litvinenco**, spoke in the second panel of the event about the fact that the Republic of Moldova cannot advance on the European integration path without taking the necessary steps to build the rule of law.

“Out of nine objectives committed by the Republic of Moldova under the EU candidate country status, six are related to justice. Broadly speaking, the Chisinau authorities are within the deadline. Several laws have already been adopted or are about to be adopted, all commitments will be fulfilled by the end of the year”, said Sergiu Litvinenco.

He explained that in terms of commitments regarding

deoligarchization, by the end of the year the Republic of Moldova must have a concept on how to exclude oligarchs from the political, audio-visual, and economic fields. “Here we have the experience of Ukraine, but also of other countries. Recently, we have seen international sanctions – the USA imposed sanctions in relation to two oligarchs - Plahotniuc and Shor - after which sanctions for corruption also followed on the part of Great Britain. And the international sanctions mechanism should be integrated into the

national deoligarchization mechanisms,” he said.

The official explained that apart from accelerating the fight against high-level corruption, which regards the prosecutor’s office and the courts, the justice system must also be cleaned up. “After the pre-vetting, the reform of the Supreme Court of Justice will follow. You cannot do such reforms without the support of international partners if you want to be successful, especially if it is about such a sensitive reform. This is why some things are more difficult, but you cannot promote a reform law without the partners’ support or without the opinion of the Venice Commission”, he concluded.

Redistribution of responsibilities on the fight against corruption

The head of the Anticorruption Prosecutor’s Office, **Veronica Dragalin**, said that the law will be applied equally to everyone, even if it is



Veronica Dragalin, head of the Anti-Corruption Prosecution Office

about representatives of the current government.

“I am optimistic about the prospects of fighting corruption in the Republic of Moldova, and this is also because we have people in society who no longer tolerate corruption and have enough courage to denounce these things when they are asked for a bribe, which allows us to accumulate evidence and to arrest the corrupt. The fact that citizens have confidence and say they are fed up with a corrupt system allows us to remove people without integrity from the justice system and institutions,” she explained.

Dragalin showed optimism, because in the first four months since she has been in charge of the Anticorruption Prosecutor’s Office, cases of high-level corruption were brought to the table.

“The prosecutors managed to finish cases such as that of the ex-president of the country, of the suspended general prosecutor, of the ex-director of the Security and Intelligence Service. For me, it’s a sign that the Anticorruption Prosecutor’s Office and the institutions they work with have managed to send a message to society that the intention is to move to large cases and that the law is applied to everyone, including at the highest level. There are no final convictions yet, but this is taking time, because the procedures must be observed,” Veronica Dragalin also said.

However, Dragalin believes that the results delivered by the Anticorruption Prosecutor’s Office and the National Anti-Corruption Center are not enough: “We have not had enough results in big corruption cases - convictions or confiscations. One of the reasons for that is the fact that the Anticorruption Prosecutor’s Office and the National Anti-Corruption Center have to deal with all the notifications that come to us, including the cases in which a bribe



Pedro Gomes Pereira, expert in the field of asset recovery and in preventing and combating corruption, organised crime, and money laundering

of 200 MDL is involved, and thus we cannot focus on the big cases”.

“There is a need to amend the law related to how big-scale corruption is defined and to the powers of the Anticorruption Prosecutor’s Office and the National Anti-Corruption Center. They must deal with high profile and big-scale corruption cases, where political factors are involved. We need to develop this mechanism to have an impact”, she stated.

Dragalin also explained that she also appreciates what journalists do to fight corruption, but that the authorities cannot say everything they know and what they do, in order not to prejudice the investigations, noting that in 2022 the Anticorruption Prosecutor’s Office initiated six criminal cases based on the articles published by the press.

Recovering criminal assets, a difficult mission

Present online at the European Integration Forum, Pedro Gomes Pereira, expert in the field of asset recovery and the prevention and fight against corruption, organized crime and money laundering, said that there exists

the necessary knowledge in fighting corruption and asset recovery at the level of some decision-makers in public institutions in Chisinau.

“There is will at the operational level, but at the legislative level, previously but also now, some political decisions show a limited desire, said Pedro Gomes Pereira. He specified that the political will in Chisinau is still insufficient and that much more can be done to reform the system.

“This leads to the idea that there is a need to depoliticize the asset recovery process. We had a lot of cases - the laundromat, the theft of the billion, matters that have deep political implications and where recovery are extremely difficult. The public says that “we want the heads, so that they are sent to prison”. However, in terms of recovery, there has not been much progress”, he explained.

The international expert also said that the asset recovery takes years – in the case of the son of a former state official who lives in Great Britain, the process started in 2017, after which the assets were recovered in 2021. But it can take even longer, even decades.



Vadim Vieru, Lawyer, Promo Lex

“There is also the aspect that the process of recovering criminal assets must be done correctly. There are many institutions that deal with asset recovery. The entire recovery system needs to be evaluated and revised to make it more effective,” concluded Pedro Gomes Pereira.

Between triumphalism and achievements

The lawyer of the Promo Lex association, **Vadim Vieru**, had a more acidic speech as regards the authorities and the general process of fighting corruption.

“The speeches of the representatives of the government are triumphalist, the government does not recognize its mistakes, even if it does not make them with bad intentions. We have enough negative precedents that, if the government changes, they will be applied for counter-reforms. And the lawyers don’t want that every time there is a change in the government, there is a new general prosecutor, and regression in justice”, said Vadim Vieru.

He also stated that in the case of judges, lawyers are their first allies,

and when President Maia Sadu did not confirm some judges in 2022, the messages were not understood by everyone. “Once the five-year term is cancelled, this constitutional mechanism is used to not appoint certain judges. It is true that many of them did not deserve to be appointed, but nevertheless, considering the career of the judge, while in this list they also got professional judges, then this has a disincentive effect on the career of the judges,” he said.

Vadim Vieru explained that even among prosecutors there are still “old habits” that still surprise lawyers.

“The workload of anti-corruption prosecutors is indeed high, but I still don’t understand how certain prosecutors from the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office can make blatant mistakes in the procedures they execute,” he said.

For her part, **Lilia Zaharia**, executive director of Transparency International-Moldova, said that the progress of some trials in the area of justice is very slow. “I haven’t seen enough results and concrete cases of corruption brought to justice, either in the past or now. People want tangible results, not just the modernization of buildings,” said Lilia Zaharia.

She stated that it would be good for the authorities to work at the pace of journalists and come up with concrete results. “Civil society, the authorities and journalists must work in tandem to be able to achieve results in the fight against corruption at the level of society [...] The press was talking about the luxury vacations of the former president Igor Dodon, but the prosecution came up with findings that it was not starting criminal proceedings. There must be prompt reactions, not only when it suits those in power, regardless of their political colour”, concluded Lilia Zaharia.



Lilia Zaharia, Executive director, Transparency International-Moldova

Security and Defence Sector Reform: Strategic Priorities

During the third panel of the Moldovan European Integration Forum, the guests have discussed the country's security and defence issues caused by the Russian invasion of the neighbouring Ukraine. With an underfunded and unmodernised army for over 30 years, the Republic of Moldova has few military options to defend itself. Moreover, the pro-Russian propaganda has worked intensively to distort the meaning of military neutrality, which today prevents the Republic of Moldova from taking an option towards the strongest military alliance of the moment – NATO.



Anatolie Nosatii, Minister of Defence

The Minister of Defence of the Republic of Moldova, **Anatolie Nosatii**, declared that the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova cannot provide security guarantees. He explained that the almost 70 percent increase in the defence budget of up to 0.56 percent of GDP is not a very big one and that there will be need for 1 to 2 percent or 6-12 billion MDL per year [about EUR 300- 600 mln].

“The increase in the defence budget for next year is salutary, because as long as we are neutral, we have to take care of our security. However, a normal military budget should account for 1 to 2 percent of GDP, for 5-7 years, for there to be

visible changes. If we think that the allocation of 0.56 percent of GDP compared to the 0.3 percent can change things, we are wrong,” the official said.

He also said that the extra money allocated in 2023 will be spent on the defence of the airspace of the Republic of Moldova. “If we allocate the money for an anti-aircraft system today, we will receive it in a year and a half at the earliest,” declared Anatolie Nosatii.

The minister also said that the external security threats are primarily the war on the territory of Ukraine. “Thanks to the sacrifice and devotion of the

Ukrainians, the situation on the front has stabilized, but the collateral effects are also felt here - we have the violation of the airspace, affecting our territory. Another effect is the flow of refugees, but also energy and economic problems. Domestically, there are threats related to the Transnistrian separatist regime, the presence of Russian troops, and the warehouse in Cobasna. We cannot neglect the risk of triggering an internal conflict by forces interested in destabilizing the situation,” the official explained.

The minister has mentioned that the Republic of Moldova has been a contributor to international security since 1997, and over 1,000 Moldovan soldiers have participated in international peacekeeping missions, including within the UN, and that there are discussions now about expanding the number of soldiers to participate in these missions.

“Thus, the Republic of Moldova demonstrates that it is not only a consumer, but also a contributor to international security,” he added.

Modernization of the Security and Intelligence Service based on western models

The director of the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS), **Alexandru Musteata**, said at the Forum that SIS must become a modern and high-performance service and that the current management is working in this direction.

He stated that the SIS is currently involved in catching contraband and



Alexandru Musteata, Director, Information and Security Service

looking for foreign spies, and its negative image dates back to the days of the Soviet KGB.

“A reformation is required in which the SIS becomes focused on the identification and prevention of risks, as it is the case, for example, in the Baltic countries, which periodically publish analytical reports on the security risks in the region”, said the director of the SIS, Alexandru Musteata, during the third panel of the European Integration Forum of the Republic of Moldova. “Reforming an institution takes time, and the legislation of the Republic of Moldova was made for times of peace, which is not the case in the current situation. This is why it is necessary to review the legislation related to the security sector,” the official said.

Alexandru Musteata also spoke about the need to fight disinformation in the context of the war waged by Russia in Ukraine. “Disinformation and propaganda can be limited, but there is also a need for pro-active communication, a kind of ‘offensive’ from the authorities, to explain to citizens why certain things are being done and where we want to go,” he declared.

The effects of disinformation and creation of parallel realities

The presidential advisor in the field of defence and national security and secretary of the Supreme Security Council, **Dorin Recean**, spoke about how disinformation can distort reality and how harmful this effect is among the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, one of the least resilient ex-Soviet states in the face of hybrid warfare.

“How can the issues related to security and resilience to propaganda be explained to the citizens? The first problem is that society does not really understand what neutrality means. In society it is not very clear what we have to defend. It doesn’t help also that we don’t have an identity yet. Partially, the new National Security Strategy will also focus on economic development, aimed at creating a sense of security for citizens, but also for private sector, said Dorin Recean.

He pleaded for investments in the area of defence and modernization of law enforcement institutions with attributions in this extremely important field, especially in the current regional context.

“In the budget for 2023, the national army receives much more money, by Euro 35 mln. The national army has been ignored for 32 years. All those in power feared the SIS. Yes, we must develop strong institutions in the field of defence and security”, he also said.

The official added that the same happened in the case of the



Dorin Recean, Adviser to President Maia Sandu in the field of defense and national security, secretary of the Supreme Security Council



Natalia Albu, Executive director, Platform for Security and Defense Initiatives

Transnistrian conflict. “Why in the 30 years since the existence of the separatist region electricity for the Republic of Moldova, a country with European aspirations, has come from this separatist region? And now we have come to depend on the energy there, why? The answer is one – corruption. We need to explain to the citizens and put pressure to convince them to bring political forces in Parliament that will allocate the money correctly, including in the field of security and defence”, concluded Recean.

Changing perceptions about the military

The executive director of the Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives, **Natalia Albu**, said at the event that citizens are looking for information about security, but do not find relevant information in the field, which leaves a lot of room for misinformation and manipulation.

“Especially in the field of security, where information is very sensitive. Especially at the level of ethnic minorities we have a collapse regarding the rapprochement to the EU – people believe that we must get closer to Russia. For 30 years, they have only talked about the neutrality

status instead of strengthening it,” said Natalia Albu.

The expert stated that the citizens do not trust the army, although a few years ago the army was second in the polls after the church. “This is because of the war in Ukraine. But people are beginning to understand that the development of the army is needed to ensure security, but I don’t think this can be done quickly enough,” said Natalia Albu.

On the other hand, **Rufin Zamfir**, an expert of the Euro-Atlantic Center for Resilience in Romania, said during the Forum that without a security climate

in Chisinau, even the Western partners - Romania, the EU, and NATO - are not safe.

“The security vulnerabilities of the Republic of Moldova came to the surface with the war started by Russia and Ukraine. Awareness of threats and vulnerabilities at the level of the elites is a good start to outline a security strategy, where dialogue with partners – Western states, NATO and the EU – is also taken into account. Western experience is something that can come to the aid of the Republic of Moldova”, said Rufin Zamfir.

He specified that the Republic of Moldova is a state subject to a mix of crises and external stress factors, and the open war started by Russia on February 24, 2022 only brought them to the fore again. “These stressors are not new. Among the risk factors are Russia’s aggressive stance towards the Republic of Moldova. The presence of destructive actors inside the country, some politically infused, misinformation and a complicated informational environment is nothing new either. It is a mix of stress factors that puts the Republic of Moldova in a rather difficult position - this is how it is seen from Bucharest,” he said.



Rufin Zamfir, Expert, Euro-Atlantic Center for Resilience, Romania

The expert also stated that Romania relates to the Republic of Moldova as a sister state that needs help and support, and Romania's position in the EU and NATO favours this transfer of experience.

Between arming and alliances: security options for Chisinau

The lecturer in security studies at the Baltic Defense College, **Dumitru Manzarari**, stated that in the discussion about neutrality in the public space, the idea that a state can ensure its security either by arming or by entering into military alliances is often ignored.

"The wealthier states prefer armament or leading roles in alliances. Poor states are forced to turn to alliances. The Republic of Moldova is a poor country with few resources. So, it's simple - if we don't have resources for defence, the only solution is the Alliance," said Dumitru Manzarari.

He also stated that when it is said that the population does not agree with the change of the neutrality status, it is a speculative and superficial argument.



Dumitru Miņzarari, Lecturer in Security Studies, Baltic Defence College

"The population does not even agree with the fact that they have low wages or that they pay taxes. We need to talk to society and explain why these things are necessary. The receiving of lethal weapons by the national military is not a bad thing. So is the mobilization, which prepares citizens for defence. These things must be discussed in the public space", said Dumitru Manzarari.

He also stated that the main security threats facing the Republic of Moldova now are the conventional war from Russia and the risk of overthrowing

the government through hybrid mechanisms. And information warfare is a support mechanism for the above threats.

"Now, when Ukraine is at war with Russia, there must be a crisis mentality on the part of the leadership of the Republic of Moldova - you cannot operate as if you were doing it in peacetime. If the state loses its ability to ensure the security of its citizens, it would also lose its ability to maintain the country economically", Manzarari concluded.

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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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