UA: UKRAINE ANALYTICA

COALITION
PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE
EUROPEAN PEOPLE'S PARTY
GOLOS
PARLIAMENT
OPPORTUNITIES
NEW FACES
NEIGHBOURHOOD
MOLDOVA
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CHALLENGES
RENEW EUROPE
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IDENTITY AND DEMOCRACY
SANCTIONS
LEGA NORD
EURONEST
ADVOCACY
ALDE

- **NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**
- **NEW UKRAINIAN POLITICIANS**
- **NEW MOLDOVAN COALITION**

![UA: Ukraine Analytica logo]

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Elections

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Leader of the political party "Golos"

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I am a member of the Golos (Voice) party in the new parliament. We are the new faces, and we want to change our country. We got the opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past and hope that we will not allow new ones to be made in the future.

There are two enemies of Ukraine today. The first enemy is an external one, in the Kremlin. It is the Russian Federation that began the war against Ukraine, annexed Crimea, and created the whole situation that is happening in Donbas and that controls it.

And the second enemy is the vulnerability of Ukrainian institutions and the economy, and the enormous corruption that has flooded the country.

> **The previous authorities clearly articulated their desire to fight the external enemy but were soft on the internal one**

The previous authorities clearly articulated their desire to fight the external enemy but were soft on the internal one. And it was because of this that they did not resist the second enemy as they should have.

Our task is to change the status. We need to set an example – we must fight both enemies. Simultaneously.

Why do celebrities go into politics? If they want to change something, is it not easier for them to do so through civil society mechanisms?

People of different backgrounds founded America. Journalists, scientists, lawyers, and many others were among them. At that

> **We got the opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past and hope that we will not allow new ones to be made in the future**

time, no one asked about your profession, because that was the moment when the whole nation was united in one call. We have a similar situation now. Maybe in 50 or 100 years, when state building will be only politicians' job, then your question will be appropriate.

As for me, I declared it a mission to bring as many new, professional people into politics as possible. In current political circumstances, we have a small group in the Rada. But, frankly, it is influential already; every MP of our party is a professional and has a point of view.

Every member of our party is a serious player in their committee meetings because

> ❝ *Empowering and developing state institutions is more important than the names of the heads of the institutions*

they perfectly know their cases and can point out mistakes. It is for the sake of such a result that one should go into politics; it is a genuinely effective mechanism.

What are the risks and challenges of foreign meddling in elections around the world?

Countries have always been meddling in the internal affairs of other countries. We have had this for ages. That is why countries need to have reliable security agencies, strict rules, and institutions that can work as obstacles to foreign meddling. Any interference from abroad undermines the sovereignty of a country.

Today in the post-truth era, with all these hybrid methods of warfare, it is difficult to detect foreign meddling in the early stages. We need to be twice as focused and committed to fighting such interference. The most significant risk now is that intrusions have become more subtle, better masked, and less easy to detect.

I believe that strong, developed, and politically independent state institutions could be the answer. Empowering and developing state institutions is more important than the names of the heads of the institutions.

Svyatoslav Vakarchuk is a Member of the Parliament of Ukraine, a rock star and a public activist. He is the lead vocalist of Okean Elzy, the most popular rock band in Ukraine. In 2019, he established a new political party, called "Golos" ("Voice", founded in 2019). As an activist, he supported the Orange Revolution 2004 and is a founder of the non-profit "Lyudi Maybutnyogo" (People of the Future). He was a member of the Ukrainian parliament 2007-2008. As a musician, he has released nine studio albums with his band. He has PhD in theoretical physics. Yale World Fellow 2015.

WHAT SHOULD UKRAINE EXPECT FROM THE NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT?

Yar Batoh
The Hague Center for Strategic Studies

After the 2019 elections, the balance of power inside the European Parliament has changed. Programmes of political groups and the number of seats they have won can help us predict the position of the legislature on questions important for Ukraine. The study shows that Ukraine will have strong support on the status of Crimea, sanctions regime, Russian aggression in the east and in the Azov Sea. On the contrary, Ukraine will not be able to secure support on Nord Stream 2 and should be ready for cooperation between the EU and Russia. Also, Ukraine can face criticism from the EU on minority rights protection and insufficient efforts against corruption.

The European Parliament (EP) has been very supportive of Ukraine in the past years. Traditionally, two largest political groups – the European People's Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) – dominated the scene. After the European elections in 2019, however, the composition changed dramatically. New forces emerged, old ones lost seats. Nonetheless, the principle is the same – one needs to get enough political groups on one's side to get something passed. Now 'enough' means at least three.

The purpose of this article is to determine the stance of all political groups on matters of importance for Ukraine. With such information at hand, it would be possible to predict with a high degree of credibility the EP's policy towards Ukraine. Will they keep supporting sanctions against Russia? What will be the EP's priorities regarding Ukraine?

Official statements published on websites of the political groups since the beginning of 2018 are taken as raw data and analysed in order to understand what these groups stand for in terms of their policy towards Ukraine and Russia[1]. Taking into account the number of seats each group has, it is possible to determine what positions the majority of the European Parliament will endorse and then extrapolate these findings to the EP's policy towards Ukraine.

Of course, the data can involve some inaccuracies, as there are cleavages inside the groups, which consist of representatives of different countries. And the conservatives from Germany and from Poland might have polarized opinions on Russia, for instance. Apart from that, the position of a group can change drastically over time under particular circumstances. Nevertheless, official statements tend to represent

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[1] The full list of all the materials used can be found under the following link:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ipp7VQlCCFZlmSiSaKqFmodINobmilEoPS7DNk6enew/edit?usp=sharing.

a position that reflects an intra-group consensus. Therefore, the data presented here are a solid basis for prognosis.

Political groups

European People's Party – 182 seats

The EPP is the biggest loser of this election – now they will have 34 seats fewer than in the previous five years. However, this conservative faction will remain the largest political group in the European legislative body. They are probably the most pro-Ukrainian group of all. Although several political groups voted for the resolution that reiterates Ukraine's prospect of the EU membership[2], the EPP was the only one that adopted an intra-group document outlining its policy towards Ukraine. They support the integration of Ukraine into the EU and even NATO (the only political group with such a position), but acknowledge that it will take at least 10 years before both parties are ready for it and may discuss more specifically the way forward. The EPP stresses the need to continue assisting Ukraine, especially across such areas as economic development, rule of law, fighting corruption, and countering Russian aggression.

This is the single group that spoke out in favour of elaborating a Marshall Plan for Ukraine. They also agree that the annexation of Crimea is illegal, support sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, condemn Russia's ongoing efforts to destabilize eastern Ukraine, and want the sanctions to remain. The EPP also voted for the EP's resolution on the incident in the Kerch Strait that defended freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea and condemned the militarization of the Black Sea.

At the same time, they want a double-track policy towards Russia – a firm position and increase in military capabilities on the one hand and a constructive dialogue where it is possible on the other. When it comes to opposing Russia, they are especially keen on scrutinizing Russian investments, particularly those in media, strategic infrastructure, and technology sectors. The EPP urges Ukrainian authorities to refrain from any measures against the rights of minorities. They voted for the resolution that recommends the European Commission to extend the Third Energy Package regulation to include the Nord Stream 2 project[3].

Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats – 154 seats

The S&D lost almost as many seats as the EPP did – 31, but has remained a powerful faction in the Parliament as well. Many of their positions coincide with the ones of the EPP, in particular regarding the status of Crimea, Ukraine's territorial integrity, Russian aggression in the east, rights of minorities, Russian investments and money laundering, ongoing dialogue with Russia, militarization of the Black Sea, and freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea.

However, there are some divergences with the conservatives. While the EPP emphasizes more how the EU can help Ukraine to carry on with reforms, the S&D expects Ukraine to do more – particularly in fighting corruption and pursuing de-oligarchization. They are ready to strengthen sanctions against Russia if the situation requires it, as well as to exert more pressure on the Kremlin to release political prisoners. The social democrats also strongly condemn human rights violations in

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2   European Union, *European Parliament Resolution of 12 December 2018 on the Implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine*, 2018
    [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0518_EN.html?redirect]

3   *MEPs Strengthen EU Rules on Pipelines to and from Third Countries*, "European Parliament News", 21 March 2018
    [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180320IPR00143/gas-meps-strengthen-eu-rules-on-pipelines-to-and-from-third-countries].

Crimea. They aren't much enthusiastic about expanding the EU's assistance to Ukraine, but nevertheless appreciate Zelenskyy's pro-European position. They call on Kyiv and Moscow to fully respect the Minsk Agreements and are willing to cooperate with Russia in data security.

Renew Europe – 108 seats

Renew Europe is an alliance between the oldest political group of liberals (ALDE) and Macron's party En Marche. Now their position has become much stronger. In last Parliament they had 9.2% of seats compared to 14.3% that they have secured this time. The liberals are likely to be the third force that will join the EPP–S&D coalition determined to move the European integration forward.

There aren't much data for the analysis as they have just created their official website and it does not contain many official statements yet. For this research, the websites of ALDE and En Marche were used. They express interest in cooperating with Russia (for example, on Iran nuclear deal and regulation of cyberspace). The liberals want to achieve a peaceful settlement in the east of Ukraine and therefore, unlike the abovementioned groups, do not emphasize Russia's involvement in the conflict.

Nevertheless, on the key issue for Ukraine they are very firm – RE condemns the occupation of Crimea and ongoing destabilization of the eastern part of Ukraine. However, they haven't voiced clearly their position on sanctions.

Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) – 74 seats

The Greens/EFA gained some electoral weight in 2019 with additional 22 seats. On many issues they are staunch supporters of Ukraine. That involves the standard package – criticism of Nord Stream 2, respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine, condemnation of the occupation of Crimea and destabilization of eastern Ukraine, freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea. They also call for new measures to tackle money laundering cases, especially those benefiting Russian oligarchs close to Putin. Apart from that, as a response to the Kerch Strait attack on Ukrainian vessels, they propose new tough sanctions on Russia as well as the extension of the OSCE mandate to cover the Azov Sea and an increased pressure to finally release Ukrainian soldiers and political prisoners.

> **The liberals want to achieve a peaceful settlement in the east of Ukraine and therefore, unlike the abovementioned groups, do not emphasize Russia's involvement in the conflict**

At the same time, the Greens/EFA tend to accentuate the issue of minority rights and blame the murder of the young Roma David Papp on propaganda against Roma and Sinti in Ukraine.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) – 62 seats

The ECR used to be the third largest faction in the European Parliament, but now they are behind five political groups on the number of seats. Their position in many cases is similar to the one of the Greens/EFA group, but on some questions, they go even further. For example, they say that it does not suffice just to make Gazprom abide by the Third Energy Package regulation, since this legislation has too many loopholes that the Russian energy giant can exploit.

Apart from that, the ECR is the only political group that has voiced strong disappointment with the restoration of Russia's voting rights

in PACE and called Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine *occupation* instead of *destabilization*. They also want to tackle Russian disinformation campaign and propaganda.

European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) – 41 seats

GUE/NGL will be the smallest political group in the new European Parliament. Ukraine does not often appear on their radar, and the rare instances when it does are mostly marred with hostility and aggressiveness from the group. They mention Ukraine mostly to condemn SBU's pressure on the Communist Party and its leader Petro Symonenko. They also, in line with Russian media and Ukrainian pro-Russian parties, criticized Andriy Parubiy, the then Head of Ukrainian Parliament, for his alleged praise of Hitler (although Parubiy did not praise the Nazi leader, but only spoke about him).

> *the ECR is the only political group that has voiced strong disappointment with the restoration of Russia's voting rights in PACE and called Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine occupation instead of destabilization*

GUE/NGL believes that the Revolution of Dignity was a coup d'état and post-Maidan Ukrainian authorities are backed by extreme nationalist and fascist groups. They are also strongly against any kind of escalation with Russia and strongly disapprove of European media's obsession with 'claimed Kremlin-orchestrated fake news and disinformation'. In general, they can put up with macro financial assistance to Ukraine, but want to raise the number of conditions on this assistance, demanding, *inter alia*, the reduction of poverty.

Identity and Democracy (ID) – 73 seats

Many feared that the far-right forces after these elections would be able to block any decision that requires a two-thirds majority. It did not happen, but still these parties are the biggest winners of the elections together with Renew Europe, as they have doubled their representation. They have not set up an official site, so the websites of three parties (and statements of their leaders) that form together 81% of the group – Alternative für Deutschland, Lega Nord, and National Rally – were taken for the analysis.

This is the group with the most unfavourable stance towards Ukraine. They openly champion closer cooperation with the Kremlin and the lifting of sanctions on Russia, as they deem those harmful to European farmers. They claim that Crimea is historically a Russian peninsula and therefore the annexation is legitimate. Moreover, they deny Russia's role in eastern Ukraine and believe that the EU's support to Ukraine only fuels the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

In their eyes, similarly to GUE/NGL, Maidan was a fake revolution and externally funded coup. Alternative für Deutschland expressed the opinion that Nord Stream 2 is beneficial for Germany. While Lega Nord and Rally National are not so keen on Germany's interest, they will probably support this view for the sake of cooperation with Russia. Lega Nord and their leader Matteo Salvini are especially hostile towards Ukraine as Salvini even claimed that Ukrainian neo-Nazis wanted to kill him.

Topics

Occupation of Crimea, Russian Aggression in the East of Ukraine

In the new European Parliament, there still will be an overwhelming majority that considers the occupation of Crimea illegal

and believes that it shouldn't be accepted by the European Union. There is support from 578 MPs on this matter – from all the political groups, except for ID and GUE/NGL. Even in these two groups, only the far-right parties are explicitly in favour of the idea that Crimea should belong to Russia. However, GUE/NGL will undoubtedly take the same position if the overall situation shifts towards this view. By and large, there is no risk that the EP's position concerning legality of the occupation of Crimea will change.

> *In the new European Parliament, there still will be an overwhelming majority that considers the occupation of Crimea illegal and believes that it shouldn't be accepted by the European Union*

The European Union has always emphasized the importance of the Minsk Agreements and the need to implement them. But the approach has changed over time. At first, they pressured Ukraine to deliver on its promises before Ukraine adopted the legislation stipulated in the Minsk Agreements (introducing amendments to the Constitution, passing the law 'on the special status' for Donbas, as well as the law on amnesty).

Since then, until recently, Russia has not been willing to do anything at all, even to guarantee a durable ceasefire. Russia, therefore, is to blame for the lack of progress in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. And now this viewpoint has the support of the majority of MPs comprising the EPP, S&D, and ECR. The latter even defined the Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine as occupation. The position of Renew Europe in this context merits special attention. They take a more appeaseable tone towards Russia and declare that they want a peaceful resolution of the conflict without stating explicitly who is to blame.

Sanctions against Russia, the Azov Sea, and the Black Sea

The question of whether the EU's sanctions against Russia will remain in place is a hot potato for both Ukrainian and European politics. The trick here is that a single country can block the prolongation of sanctions and we have a couple of those willing to do that, but hesitating yet, e.g. Italy or Hungary. However, when it comes to the European Parliament, the support for sanctions is quite large – 470 MPs from four political groups (EPP, S&D, Greens/EFA, and ECR). More than that, three out of four (all except the EPP) now want to even strengthen the sanctions regime, mainly in the light of the Kerch Strait incident. These three parties together have 288 MPs, which is 88 legislators short of the majority. It means that Ukraine has to report any provocation from Russia to the EPP group in order to convince them that sanctions can reduce the level of Russian aggressiveness.

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Some political groups paid attention to the situation in the Azov Sea even before the incident in the Kerch Strait took place. The Russian assault against Ukrainian vessels made all major political groups articulate their position on the matter. The EPP, S&D, Greens/EFA, and ECR spoke out in favour of freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea and condemned Russian actions and ongoing militarization of the Black Sea region. What

is also important for Ukraine is the fact that this coalition of 470 MPs has proposed the idea of extending the OSCE Mission's mandate to the Azov Sea.

Release of Political Prisoners

In the recent one and a half years, three political groups (EPP, S&D, and Greens/EFA) made statements calling on Russia to release Ukrainian political prisoners, with special attention to Oleg Sentsov. These groups together constitute a majority in the new European Parliament (408 mandates). Therefore, there will be a support of the EP to advance further efforts on prisoners. The S&D even proposes to increase pressure on the Kremlin to facilitate the process. However, recent events may shape the position of the European Parliament on this

> **" Two largest political groups are pushing forward the issue of reforms and fight against corruption in Ukraine**

topic. Russia released 35 Ukrainian political prisoners in a swap deal in September. This may complicate for Ukraine the securing of the EP's support to pressure Russia to release remaining prisoners, as 'big names' such as Sentsov, Kolchenko, and Suschenko returned to Ukraine.

Integration of Ukraine in the EU

On the one hand, the EPP, S&D, and ALDE (RE in the new EP) all voted for the resolution that supports a prospect of the EU membership for Ukraine. And these three political groups will have the majority of votes in the new legislature. On the other hand, among them only the EPP explicitly declared in its own statement the support for the future Ukrainian membership in

the EU and was rather specific about it. However, even they think that a meaningful dialogue on this question can be launched only in a decade.

All other political groups are silent on this matter, except for ID, which wants the EU to cease the assistance to Ukraine entirely, let alone grant it the prospect of membership. In general, Ukraine's accession to the EU for the groups in the EP is a matter of a distant future at best. Ukraine is not likely to find a big number of allies who will be willing to push this question onto the EP's agenda.

Reforms, Fight against Corruption, and Minority Rights

Two largest political groups are pushing forward the issue of reforms and fight against corruption in Ukraine. Yet, they have different perspectives – while the EPP is particularly vocal about providing more support to Ukraine in order to get things done, the S&D maintains that Ukraine does not do enough in this area and should accelerate reforms. In any case, these groups do not constitute a majority and will need allies to advance this agenda.

ID is not interested in Ukraine at all. GUE/NGL does not care about Ukraine's success, but demands that Ukraine does more if it wants to get European money. RE, the ECR, and the Greens/EFA did not explicitly comment on the issue, but their stance on Ukraine will probably boil down to the continuation of financial support to help Ukraine implement reforms. Therefore, the European Union will keep on nurturing Ukraine's capacity to introduce reforms; however, it will also want to see more efforts from Ukraine as well.

The European Parliament really cares about minorities, and almost all political groups (except for ID) bring up this issue in their relations with foreign countries. When it comes to Ukraine, three political groups (EPP,

S&D, and Greens/EFA) that will constitute a majority in the new Parliament raised their concerns about the situation with minorities in Ukraine. This can be both a problem and an opportunity for our relations with the European Parliament. If we pay more attention to minority rights in Ukraine, especially rights of Roma and Sinti, it will have a positive impact on our relations with the EP. Ukraine will prove it is a responsible partner that respects the principles the EU is based upon. It also will enable Ukraine to attract more money and assistance from the EU. On the contrary, if we ignore the issue, it will inevitably generate criticism from our European partners and make an agreement between us more difficult in the future, including on financial matters.

Dialogue with Moscow, Common Framework in Cyberspace

Although the European Parliament takes and will continue to take a firm stance towards Russia, the idea of fostering a dialogue with Russia is in the air. Different political groups understand the dialogue in different ways. For example, ID wants to launch a full-scale cooperation with Russia and get rid of sanctions altogether. While the EPP and S&D believe that Russia should bear responsibility for the actions it takes (towards Ukraine in particular), they admit that there are areas that require cooperation with Russia as a major player on the world stage. Therefore, it is inevitable that initiatives expanding cooperation with Russia in crucial spheres for the EU will find wide support in the EP.

One of such areas can be a common framework in cyber security and data management. The S&D and RE are very supportive of it. GUE/NGL's and ID's positive stance towards any kind of cooperation with Russia can lead us to assume that they will support such cooperation as well. This mix of political groups falls short from the majority by two votes, but it is highly probable that

the issue will find more support among other political groups or non-affiliated MPs.

> **Therefore, the EPP, S&D, and Greens/EFA, who have 408 MPs together, propose to scrutinize more thoroughly Russian investments and to develop new improved measures to fight money laundering with a special emphasis on the Russians**

Moreover, if the United Kingdom leaves the EU, the share of these four political groups in the EP will rise. We should be ready for such cooperation and be proactive. At the very least, we must secure deeper cooperation with the EU in cyberspace earlier than Russians do and agree upon a uniform approach towards Russia in this sphere. We must emphasize our potential and experience, i.e. a large number of IT specialists and successful cases of countering cyber threats.

Measures against Money Laundering and Nord Stream 2

Unexpectedly, many political groups are very concerned about Russian investments and money laundering. Both are believed to augment the influence of Russian oligarchs close to Putin and give Russia leverage to shape policies of European countries. Therefore, the EPP, S&D, and Greens/EFA, who have 408 MPs together, propose to scrutinize more thoroughly Russian investments and to develop new improved measures to fight money laundering with a special emphasis on the Russians. This is a tremendous opportunity for Ukraine to combine efforts with the Europeans in tackling Russian financial encroachment, as Kyiv also struggles with Russia's extensive economic influence and has a rich experience in reducing it.

At the end of the tenure of the outgoing European Parliament, five political groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, and ECR) voted for the recommendation to the European Commission to extend the application of the Third Energy Package to third parties, which was clearly targeted at Nord Stream 2. In the current Parliament,

> **The majority of the EP supports the prospect of the EU membership for Ukraine in general, but even for the European parliamentarians it is a matter of a very distant future**

these factions will constitute a majority, so the position of the legislature is not likely to change. At the same time, there are differences inside this large coalition concerning how to approach the issue.

The EPP and S&D are not very vocal in terms of countering Nord Stream 2. The reason may be the interests of two big German political parties that joined the coalition (CDU and SPD) and support the construction of the pipeline, arguably benefitting German energy industry. On the contrary, the Greens/EFA and ECR are tougher towards the project. The latter even proposes a stronger regulation for Nord Stream 2, as the one recommended by the EP previously, in their opinion, has many loopholes that Gazprom can take advantage of. However, these two groups constitute only 136 MPs, and therefore the EP's position will not become tougher than it is now, and the European legislators will not be championing against the Nord Stream 2 project as such (the approach that has been pursued by the Ukrainian authorities for the past five years). We need to acknowledge that the European Parliament will not be our ally in preventing Nord Stream 2 from being constructed.

Conclusions

The analysis shows that, despite the deterioration of the political landscape in the new EP, Ukraine will be able to secure the legislature's support on the most important issues – non-acceptance of the occupation of Crimea and Russia's destabilization efforts in the east of Ukraine, sanctions regime, freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea, pressure on Russia to release political prisoners.

The majority of the EP supports the prospect of the EU membership for Ukraine in general, but even for the European parliamentarians it is a matter of a very distant future. There are two questions that can be either a headache or an opportunity for the Ukrainian-European relations, namely minority rights and reforms, especially in the fight against corruption. Ukraine can posture itself as a reliable partner by making progress in these areas. Lack of progress, on the contrary, will complicate the relations with the Union.

The EP will not be blocking the Nord Stream 2 project, although they support the idea of making Gazprom abide by the European regulation of competition on energy markets. Finally, Ukraine needs to seize the opportunities that the upcoming proposals of the European Parliament might bring. Ukraine should not stand idly and watch the emergence of a common cyber security framework between the EU and Russia, but should make its own proposal instead. And Ukraine can also help the Europeans tackle money laundering and influence of Russian money on their politics while they are ready to do it themselves.

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NEW TERM

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The European Parliament is often criticised for being unaccountable to its citizens and highly technocratic. The main decisions are made in the committees and there is hardly any debate in the plenary. This apolitical nature of the EP will likely be changed in this new legislative period, shaping a more politicised European assembly. What does it mean for European foreign policy, in particular in the Eastern Neighbourhood? While traditionally the European Parliament is considered to have limited competences in foreign policy, this article shows that at least with regard to the European Neighbourhood Policy, it enjoys considerable powers and informal influence. Taking the case of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, it also analyses how it has utilized its opportunities to conduct interparliamentary diplomacy and what its purpose has been for MEPs.

European Parliament and the EU Legislative Process

The legislative process in the EU is lengthy and complicated. Three major institutions are involved in it: the European Commission (EC), the Council of Ministers, and the European Parliament (EP). The EP's competences were substantially increased in the Maastricht Treaty that established the co-decision procedure, thus putting the Parliament on an equal footing with the Council of Ministers in legislative matters. This meant that under the co-decision procedure, a legislative proposal could not be adopted without the EP's consent to it. With the Treaty of Lisbon, co-decision became the ordinary legislative procedure also for budgetary issues, which had previously been an exclusive competence of the Council. Thus, from a merely consultative body, the EP has grown into a legislative body that is more reminiscent

of a traditional parliament. However, there are still some major limitations to the EP's functions. For example, it cannot initiate legislation, as this is a sole prerogative of the European Commission. Also, in areas where the EU shares competences with the member states, including foreign policy, the EP plays only a consultative role.

One of the reasons why the increase in EP competences happened is because it was hoped that a more powerful parliament would help overcome the criticism that the EU was run by unelected bureaucrats and the executives of European member states (MS), giving no opportunity to citizens to voice their concerns. Indeed, increased competences of a directly elected European Assembly might have somewhat mitigated the democratic deficit in the EU political process. However, the democratic credentials of the European Assembly itself have also been subject to criticism.

One of the charges pressed against the Parliament is that there is lack of deliberation among its members (MEPs)[1]. Regardless of which party group dominates the Parliament, its general policy direction stays the same[2], with discussions having technical rather than political nature and happening mainly in the committees[3]. Lack of deliberation in the Parliament is partially connected with inter-institutional practices of negotiations. For example, due to continuous intense communication between the Parliament and the Commission, the latter stays well aware of the Parliament's views on various policies. This enables the Commission to prepare legislative proposals that would pass in the EP without major amendments[4]. A similar connection exists between the Parliament and the Council. MEPs, whose party controls the government of a member state (and therefore sits on the Council), tend to be selected for the role of the Parliament's rapporteurs on new policy proposals, as they allegedly have better access to the information in the Council[5]. In any case, final negotiations on new legislation between the three major institutions happen during the so-called trilogue process that takes place behind closed doors[6].

The May 2019 European elections were peculiar in many respects. For the first time, two biggest party groups, the centre right EPP and the centre left S&D did not manage to secure the majority of votes, leading them to form a coalition with a third centrist party group, Renew Europe (formerly ALDE). Negotiations to form a coalition were not easy, with the Greens looming as another potential third (or fourth) candidate in the coalition. Secondly, the EP became more fractured, with two big party groups losing votes, while several others gaining them. This reflects the citizens' wish for change in the overall political course of the EU.

However, change is understood differently by different people, resulting in the increase in seats for both liberal pro-European Greens and the far right Eurosceptic Identity and Democracy party groups. Such fragmentation might not necessarily be a bad thing though. Instead, it might ensure more debate in the plenary, with discussions of a more political rather than technical character. It, however, can also mean that issues will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis,[7] and securing majorities for the ruling coalition might be more difficult.

The dialogue and information exchange between the EP and the Commission, which, as was mentioned before, have so far ensured a high degree of awareness in the Commission of the views in the Parliament, might be more difficult and problematic. The nomination of Ursula von der Leyen for the post of the European Commission President was heavily criticised by the

1   A. Follesdal, S. Hix, Why *There Is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik,* "JCMS" 44 (3), 2006, pp. 533–62.

2   *The European Parliament: Elected, Yet Strangely Unaccountable,* "The Economist", 15 May 2014 [http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21602200-european-elections-will-neither-lend-new-credibility-european-parliament-nor-give access: 26 May 2017].

3   Follesdal and Hix (n 1).

4   S. Hix, B. Hoyland, *Empowerment of the European Parliament,* "Annual Review of Political Science", 16, 2013, pp. 171–89.

5   Ibid.

6   *The European Parliament: Elected, Yet Strangely Unaccountable* (n 2).

7   *Fragmentation Comes to the European Parliament. It Might Improve It,* "The Economist", 30 May 2019 [https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/05/30/fragmentation-comes-to-the-european-parliament-it-might-improve-it].

MEPs. Her nomination effectively meant ignoring the Spitzenkandidat system, which was introduced to ensure a more democratic nomination of the head of the European executive. The EP in the end endorsed von der Leyen's candidacy, although with a very narrow majority. Thus, the previous high level of information flow and collaboration might decrease, leading to more friction in the legislative process.

European Parliament and Foreign Policy

The EP has four main functions with regard to EU external relations: consultative, budgetary, approval of international agreements, and undertaking parliamentary diplomacy[8]. On issues where European member states wish to sustain more control, such as in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), along with the Common Security and Defence Policy, the European Parliament has only a consultative role. It issues opinions and has a right to be informed on the general policy direction[9].

The EP's opinions are, however, not legally binding for the Council. A very direct way of influencing EU foreign policy is the EP's role as a co-legislator in budgetary matters. The EP used its power to allocate budget to CFSP to establish rules of procedure for information and control over this policy area[10]. The EP also has equal legislative power to other EU institutions in matters of trade, one of the main tools in EU relations with third states. Conclusion of international agreements, including Association

Agreements, cannot proceed without its consent. Finally, the day-to-day business of the EP involves interparliamentary diplomacy. It is done through parliamentary delegations for relations with third states and in the context of European Neighbourhood through common parliamentary assemblies, namely the Parliamentary Assembly for the Mediterranean for the Southern Neighbourhood and the Euronest – the Parliamentary Assembly for the Eastern Partnership.

> **The EP's competences in the ENP are thus much more substantial than in purely CFSP matters. For example, the ENP main tools are Association Agreements and Partnership Cooperation Agreements that are adopted in co-legislation with the EP**

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is an interesting case with regard to the EU policy process. It does not fall entirely in the area of exclusive EU competence, nor is it in the shared competence field in the traditional sense. The ENP has been termed a 'cross-pillar' policy as it combines tools from different levels of EU policy making[11]. The EP's competences in the ENP are thus much more substantial than in purely CFSP matters. For example, the ENP main tools are Association Agreements and Partnership Cooperation Agreements that are adopted in co-legislation with the EP. The Parliament

8 M. Gora, *The European Parliament as an Agenda Setter of the EU Policy towards Its Neighborhood,* [in:] K. Raube, M. Müftüler-Baç, J. Wouters (eds), *Parliamentary Cooperation and Diplomacy in EU External Relations: An Essential Companion (Leuven Global Governance Series), Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham, UK 2019.*

9 J. E. Fossum, G. Rosen, *Off or on Field? The Multilevel Parliamentary Field of EU External Relations*, [in:] K. Raube, M. Müftüler-Baç, J. Wouters (eds), *Parliamentary Cooperation and Diplomacy in EU External Relations: An Essential Companion (Leuven Global Governance Series), Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham, UK 2019.*

10 Ibid., p.19

11 Gora (n 8).

also oversees the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) – the main financing source of the ENP. Gora[12] also points to the importance of the ENP for MEPs and their self-perception of being agenda-setters in this policy area. Especially the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) has been active in the ENP, organising high-level conferences, sending ad hoc missions to the partner countries that effectively played a role of the EU representative, and creating specialised groups within the Committee (such as Vilnius Group in the run-up to the Vilnius EaP Summit in 2013).

The EP's committee system shapes the work of the whole Parliament in many important ways. Research shows that generally, MEPs prefer to sit on those committees where the EP's legislative competences are on par with other EU institutions[13]. While this is not the case for AFET, it nevertheless has traditionally been one of the most prestigious committees for MEPs to sit on. One of the reasons for that might well be the far greater room to influence the policy-making process than it might look at first glance (at least in the ENP). However, as suggested by Whitaker, MEPs' motivations to serve in the EP might be other than solely 'legislating for constituency specific projects'[14]. Among other reasons reported by the MEPs for their choice of the committee is the wish to specialise in a certain policy area, which correlates with the 'information theory' of parliamentary organisation. In many issues, but especially in international affairs, the EP has become a solid source of knowledge. In the ENP in particular, MEPs' strong expertise has served as leverage in their ability to influence agenda-setting process in this policy area[15].

European Neighbourhood Policy: Brief Overview

A separate track for Eastern Europe and South Caucasus within the European Neighbourhood Policy, initially proposed by Sweden and Poland, was established in 2009. While the politics towards the Eastern partner countries largely drew on the EU's previous experience with democratisation in Central Europe – by far the biggest achievement of the EU's normative power – unlike the Central European countries, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries were never offered an EU membership prospect. Thus, the idea behind the EaP, and the ENP in general, to create a 'ring of friends' among the EU's neighbours was underpinned by the EU's distinct character of foreign policy that worked so well in Central Europe, namely the idea of the EU acting as a 'transformative power'. It was thought that through the EaP the EU would manage to foster democratic changes in Eastern Europe.

Theories of conditionality and socialisation that view the EU as a *sui generis* normative power are commonly applied to explain the Union's democratisation impact[16]. The conditionality approach holds that the EU plays a role of an incentives provider. It offers lucrative economic and political cooperation to other countries in exchange for democratic transformation. The socialisation theory states that through more intensive interactions with the EU and greater exposure to the ideas of liberal

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12 Ibid.

13 R. Whitaker, *A Case of 'You Can Always Get What You Want'? Committee Assignments in the European Parliament,* "Parliamentary Affairs" 72, 2019, pp. 162–181.

14 Ibid. p 164

15 Gora (n 8).

16 S. Buşcaneanu, *EU Democracy Promotion in Eastern ENP Countries,* "East European Politics and Societies and Cultures" 29 (1), 2015, pp. 248–86 [doi:10.1177/0888325414535430].

democracy, the society of a partner country starts appropriating them and changes from within.

While the ENP was established with the conditionality and socialisation approaches in mind, it has become subject to a common criticism after the 2015 review (and with the 2016 EU Foreign Policy Strategy, of EU foreign policy in general) indicating that the normative component of the ENP has been downgraded. A number of security challenges the EU was facing in its neighbourhood made it opt for a more pragmatic approach. Among those challenges were the refugee crisis caused by instability in the Middle East and North Africa, the war in Ukraine, and the annexation of Crimea, accompanied by worsening of relations with Russia, followed by the EU imposing sanctions on Russia and Moscow responding in the same manner. Finally, the very origins of the conflict in Ukraine come from peaceful demonstrations to support pro-European orientation of Ukraine and adoption of the Association Agreement. Naturally, it would be wrong to say that the conflict in Ukraine started because of the EU or its policy towards Ukraine per se. It rather has to do with Russia's interpretation of the EU policy, as well as its claim over 'near abroad'. However, the EU indeed was at the centre of the debate in Ukraine that later turned into a military conflict.

Therefore, whatever value-based politics Brussels might want to conduct in Eastern Europe, it could not have left its approach to the EaP unchanged after 2014. The focus thus shifted to stabilisation and differentiation (and in the EU Global Strategy – resilience), meaning a more pragmatic interest-based relationship. This approach was also reflected in Deliverables 2020 – a document meant to shape the EaP's multilateral track. There, the emphasis was made on economic development, people-to-people contacts, climate change, and good governance. The risk of emphasizing stability over reforms threatens with policy inertia, geopoliticisation of the EaP, and the end of the EU 'transformative power'[17]. At the same time, the normative aspect of the EU policy is anchored in the Association Agreements that are now being implemented by Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

Parliamentary Diplomacy in EaP: The Case of Euronest PA

Talking about the EP's role in the European Neighbourhood, and more specifically in the EaP, the Parliament's diplomatic work should be analysed more closely. Thus, in this section I will briefly look at the work of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly (PA) and its role in fostering contacts with the EaP partner countries.

The Euronest PA consists of 110 members (60 MEPs and 10 MPs from each EaP partner country apart from Belarus[18]). The assembly meets once a year for the purposes of 'parliamentary consultation, supervision and monitoring'[19]. Established in 2009, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly was clearly underpinned by the socialisation approach of the EU. It was established to 'promote political association and further economic integration between the European Union and the EU's Eastern European partners[20]'. It was assumed that

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17 J. Crombois, *The Eastern Partnership: Geopolitics and Policy Inertia,* Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies 18 (1), 2019, pp. 89–96.

18 The fact that Belarus's participation in the Euronest PA was suspended due to the absence of democratic elections was criticised by many, as, it was argued, Azerbaijan, despite an equally bad democratic record, was still included.

19 "Euronest Web" [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/euronest/en/home.html].

20 Ibid.

meetings with MEPs and examining the ways of parliamentary work would create a socialisation effect for the members of parliaments from partner countries.

While joint ownership of the project was proclaimed, the assembly agenda was clearly driven by the EU. On examining its first three plenary sessions in 2013, Kostanyan and Vandecasteele point out that the resolutions adopted by the assembly are clearly influenced by the EU views on areas in concern[21]. They also argue that the process of socialisation with the EU values was quite slow and rather superficial. Members of parliaments from EaP partner countries appropriated EU norms only to the extent of 'strategic calculation', rather than to the stage of 'normative suasion'.

> *the Euronest PA agenda has been largely EU-driven and mainly reflected the EU perspectives on the issues addressed*

To have a sense of how the Euronest PA activity developed over the past eight years, it is worth looking at the resolutions it adopted. During the two-day meeting of the annual Euronest PA, the four standing committees of the assembly prepare draft resolutions on their respective issue areas that are then voted on at the plenary. In addition, other resolutions may be adopted that deal with outstanding issues, for example, the resolution on 'Ukrainian Political Prisoners in Russia, Notably Oleg Sentsov' adopted in 2018. The four standing committees deal with Political Affairs, Human Rights, and Democracy; Economic Integration, Legal Approximation, and Convergence with EU Policies; Energy Security; and Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Culture, and Civil Society. For the purposes of this study, I looked at the resolutions adopted by the Committee on Political Affairs, Human Rights, and Democracy until today.

The Euronest PA managed to adopt resolutions on political affairs at all of its plenaries, except for the very first one in 2011, when disagreements over Nagorno-Karabakh among MPs from Armenia and Azerbaijan prevented it[22]. Three of the six resolutions that the first standing committee deals with address security situation and common security threats the EU and the EaP partners face (2013, 2016, and 2018); one is devoted to media freedom (2017); one covers future prospects of EaP development under the European Neighbourhood Instrument in 2014-2020 (2015); and one, notably the first one, addresses democratic situation in the EU and EaP partner countries (2012).

All resolutions, apart from one, are of a very general character, addressing a broad range of issues in the European Neighbourhood. The media freedom resolution is probably the most focused one, covering the specific issue area in more detail as well as pointing to concrete measures and legislative reforms that states are encouraged to carry out. In contrast to it, issues in the resolution from the year before (2016) on external threats to security range from the conflict in Ukraine to the refugee crisis in Europe, to the war in Syria and fight against terrorism.

The language and focus of the resolutions reflect changing priorities of the EU foreign policy in general, as well as regional security developments. While the first resolution

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21 H. Kostanyan, B. Vandecasteele, *The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly: The European Parliament as a Socializer of Its Counterparts in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood?,* "EU Diplomacy Papers" 5, College of Europe 2013.

22 Ibid.

addresses democracy and human rights in EaP countries (thus the EU normative approach to the EaP is still very tangible), the one from 2018 focuses on 'resilience' in the Eastern Neighbourhood – a word borrowed from the EU Global Strategy 2016 – and countering the Russian threat. In addition, same as at other EaP fora (e.g. EaP Summit of 2017), membership perspective for EaP partners is watered down. The resolution from 2013 still speaks about 'the European perspective for the most ambitious Eastern European partner countries', while the 2018 document carefully mentions 'new avenues for deeper integration', namely the EU customs union, energy union, and digital union.

Russia's involvement in the conflicts in EaP partner countries receives a lot of attention in virtually every resolution. It is for a reason, since Russia has posed the main security challenge to Eastern Europe, as well as increasingly to the EU after it annexed Crimea in 2014 and launched a war in eastern Ukraine. In addition, frozen conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan remain unresolved and Russia is directly or indirectly involved in all of them.

It can be concluded from this cursory analysis that same as at its earlier stages, the Euronest PA agenda has been largely EU-driven and mainly reflected the EU perspectives on the issues addressed. The 'EU vocabulary' can be easily identified in the text of resolutions, with such terms as 'political association and economic integration' and 'democratic governance', etc. indicating the continuous effort (or rather inertia?) to 'socialise' the Eastern partners through parliamentary diplomacy. Research done in 2013 looked into the

extent to which the socialisation effect in the Euronest assembly had occurred. In 2019, it is more pertinent to ask whether this effect is still a goal at all or rather the purpose of the Euronest PA for MEPs is purely informational (which does not make it anyhow less legitimate). The EU shift to a more pragmatic policy making in external action in general and, as the ENP review showed, lack of success in democratic transformation in the Neighbourhood in particular prompted some analysts to term the ENP a 'fig leaf' for traditional interest-based EU foreign policy[23]. Hopes are, therefore, vested in the three associated partner countries, which, in case of successful implementation of the Association Agreements, could restore the EU's normative approach to its neighbourhood[24].

Conclusions

The practical question for policy makers in Eastern partner countries today is how the approach of the EU and its different institutions towards the EaP will change with the change of leadership. While at the time of writing, the college of the European Commission has not been finalised yet, the new European Parliament has already started operating. Its fragmented character and three-member ruling coalition indicate that more debate will happen within committees and at the plenary and that it will be more politicised.

The EU needs to have an internal debate on what values it stands for and in what political and ideological direction it wants to go. At the same time, due to internal as well as external factors, the EU approach in the ENP has already shifted from a normative to a more interest-based one. The European

23 S. Blockmans, *The Obsolescence of the European Neighbourhood Policy,* Centre for European Policy Studies, Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd.: London 2017.

24 A. Makarychev, *Eastern Borderlands as Europe-Makers: (How) Can Neighbors Redefine the EU?* "3DCFTAs.eu", 19 April 2017.

Parliament remains an important point of contact for EaP partner countries to communicate their concerns and interests to the EU. While probably being the strongest supporter and advocate of the EaP partners among all EU institutions, the EP has also, along the lines of the general EU foreign policy direction, downgraded its normative approach towards the EaP.

With the current debate about the norms the EU stands for, this might not necessarily be a negative thing. Also, discussing more pragmatic issues in times when security in Europe is challenged is very appropriate. In addition, for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, commitments to implement reforms remain in place under the Association Agreements.

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THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN-RUSSIAN RAPPROCHEMENT BY THE IDENTITY AND DEMOCRACY PARTY ON UKRAINIAN-EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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The 2019 European elections saw the erosion of the European People's Party (EPP) and Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) standing in the European Parliament. Of all the groups to fill this political vacuum, one of the more concerning is a coalition of nationalist and far-right parties known as Identity and Democracy (ID). This article will examine how ID's presence in the European Parliament may act as a vehicle towards rapprochement between the European Union and the Russian Federation sought by Lega Nord, Alternative for Germany, and other parties in ID's coalition. This analysis is structured around the role of the parliament in the formation of the European Union's strategic goals and foreign policy. This article will investigate ID's specific policy objectives in pursuing European-Russian rapprochement based on policy positions put forth by parties in the coalition and personal interests of prominent ID members. This article will then describe how ID's presence in the European Parliament would influence Ukraine's ongoing process of European integration and the EU-Ukraine relations as a whole.

In the wake of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, populist and reactionary parties steadily filtered into local governments, state parliaments, and national legislative branches throughout the European Union. However, following the defeat of Marine Le Pen in the 2017 French presidential election and of Geert Wilders in the 2017 Dutch general elections, populist forces in the European Union fixated themselves on a new political theatre – the European Parliament.

The entry of Identity and Democracy (ID) into the ninth European Parliament signalled both the growing presence of the fringe right wing in European politics and the erosion of traditional centrist parties in the EU's legislative body. In addition to anti-immigrant rhetoric and intense Euroscepticism, one of the defining features of Identity and Democracy is a consistent push for normalisation and improvement of relations with the Russian Federation. This article will investigate the role of the European Parliament in the creation of the EU's foreign policy as well as the known connections between ID's constituent parties and Russian political interests. It will be concluded with potential ways that ID could affect the EU-Ukraine relations in the pursuit of

rapprochement, as well as how Ukrainian policymakers should proceed with this faction in the parliament.

The Role of the European Parliament in the Development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy

The shared foreign policy of the European Union is formally known as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which refers to the management of the EU's bloc-wide bilateral relationships with other states, the creation and organisation of defence policies, and any other aspects of diplomacy related to the entirety of the European Union. This aspect of the EU policy is managed by the European External Action Service (EEAS), an institution created with the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon and headed by a high representative appointed by the European Council. While individual members of the European Union are able to conduct foreign policy and diplomacy, most matters regarding trade and economic sanctions are managed on a union-wide basis by the high representative.

Between the diplomatic activities carried out by individual members of the European Union and the broader bloc-wide representation handled by the EEAS, it would seem that the European Parliament would have relatively little impact on the development of the shared foreign policy of the European Union. This is partially due to the European Parliament's lack of 'legislative initiative', meaning that the organ cannot draft its own legislation. Instead, resolutions and directives are provided to the parliament from the three 'executive' organs of the European Union (the European Commission, president of the European Union, and the European Council). Additionally, the implementation of any document that passes a vote in the European Parliament is dependent on the approval of the Council of the European

Union – a gathering of ministers from each member of the European Union that acts as a secondary chamber in the EU's legislative system.

However, there are two areas in which the European Parliament maintains a critical role in the foreign policy process. One of these is in the ratification of bilateral treaties signed by the European Union and the other party. As with all legislative acts, approval of a treaty requires a simple-majority vote from the parliament. While it would seem that a simple-majority vote would be the lowest barrier for a treaty to clear (compared to the unanimity required in the European Council and qualified majority vote in the Council of the European Union), it also represents potentially the most volatile one, as the parliament is not a primary actor in the negotiation process and the approval of a treaty by an MEP can be heavily dependent on political factors versus diplomatic interests.

Additionally, the European Parliament does feature its own parallel diplomatic representation through the maintenance of parliamentary delegations of the European Union. These missions are established in countries with close ties to the EU that are aiming to set up some type of integration or legislative proximity. This is not a direct form of diplomacy but it is a viable means of fostering political cooperation between the EU and another party outside of the EEAS. Additionally, the European Parliament is charged with approving the operating budget of the EEAS each year.

Identity and Democracy in the European Parliament

Identity and Democracy is a coalition composed of several right-wing parties that formally entered the European Parliament on 17 June 2019. Considered the successor of the earlier Europe of Nations and

Freedom coalition[1], ID represents the largest gathering of conservatives in the European Parliament outside of the centre-right European People's Party, with its grouping containing nationalists, Eurosceptics, and other reactionary MEPs. The party is generally considered to be along the fringes of the parliament's political spectrum and holds 73 out of the European Parliament's 751 seats, making it the fifth largest grouping in the European Parliament.

At the core of ID's coalition are three Eurosceptic parties. The first is Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD), a right-wing German party known for its staunch anti-refugee rhetoric that has built a modest presence in German state parliaments – particularly in the country's eastern lands. The second, the National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN), is a French political party formerly known as Front National. Lega Nord (Lega) holds a plurality of ID's seats, with 28 out of 73 seats. Outside of these three parties, ID's remaining 14 seats are divided between MEPs from Austria (3), Belgium (3), Czech Republic (2), Denmark (1), Estonia (1), Finland (2), and two formally independent MEPs from France. With the planned exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, the total size of the parliament will shrink from 751 seats to 705, with ID gaining three additional seats originally assigned to the United Kingdom, bringing the party's total seats to 76.

Of the three major parties in ID, Lega possesses arguably the largest amount of domestic political capital as its party chairman Matteo Salvini previously held the position of deputy prime minister of Italy and minister of the interior. It was part of a coalition government between Lega Nord and the Five Star Movement, until the collapse of the coalition in early September 2019. In addition to forming the bulk of ID, Lega also maintains a presence in Italy's national parliament and several subnational legislative assemblies. ID's three representatives from Austria are members of the Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPO), which also until recently participated in a ruling coalition with the Austrian People's Party (OVP). However, with the exception of these two parties, members of ID have struggled to hold significant representation on a national scale and have instead been mostly limited to state legislative bodies and local political offices. Following the collapse of Lega's and FPO's coalition governments, the combined presence of ID in the European Parliament represents one of the most significant accumulations of political capital by the far right in Europe.

Identity and Democracy and Russian Political Interests

In the years following the so-called Colour Revolutions, the Russian government has taken an increasingly hostile posturing towards the European Union and wider transatlantic community. The 2004 eastward expansion of the European Union and NATO and 2011 protests in Russia have been credited by the Russian authorities as efforts to encroach on Russia's sphere of influence and destabilise the country[2]. In the wake of Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the subsequent war in

1 Z. Weise, *Salvini Alliance to Be Named Identity and Democracy*, "Politico", 12 June 2019 [https://www.politico.eu/article/matteo-salvini-european-parliament-alliance-to-be-named-identity-and-democracy/ access: 27 July 2019].

2 *Председатель Правительства Российской Федерации В.В.Путин провёл заседание Координационного совета Общероссийского народного фронта (Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Holds Coordination Meeting of the Russian Popular Front),* Archive of the Russian Government, 2011 [https://web.archive.org/web/20120607083034/http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/17330/ access: 05 August 2019].

Donbas, relations between Russia and the Western world have plunged to a new low. Met with sanctions and limited avenues for diplomacy, the Russian government had turned to its relationship with Europe's political fringe in an effort to destabilise and fracture a seemingly united stance against its military adventurism. While a Russian connection to the coordination and funding of the European political fringe was by no means a new phenomenon, by 2015 this network served a new strategic purpose in Russian foreign policy.

> **The most basic utility such parties provide to Russia is generating a sense of political disorientation and division in their respective political spheres. By propping up parties built on Euroscepticism, anti-immigrant sentiment**

The most basic utility such parties provide to Russia is generating a sense of political disorientation and division in their respective political spheres. By propping up parties built on Euroscepticism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and contempt for both traditional media and what is commonly seen as the 'liberal consensus', the Russian Federation has been able to capitalise on the divisions within the Western world and amplify pre-existing political divides.

These parties also provide an opportunity for advocacy of Russian interests in several layers of government. A recurring topic from such parties is the need to repeal the sanctions regime established after the annexation of Crimea. Finally, what is arguably the greatest benefit for Russia is their sense of legitimacy. By having European lawmakers speak openly in support of removing the sanctions placed on the Russian Federation, regularly travel to Russia, and visit disputed areas and frozen conflicts[3] while holding office and entering ruling coalitions, an increasingly isolated Moscow gains a mouthpiece in European politics. Additionally, engagement with such fringe elements can act as a sort of paradiplomacy, as individual parties and party leaders can have warm ties with the Russian Federation while their countries maintain policies in opposition to Russian interests.

Inter-party Cooperation Agreements

The most overt connection between members of ID and Russian political actors are inter-party cooperation agreements held with United Russia, the ruling party of the Russian government. Currently FPO and Lega Nord both hold cooperation agreements with United Russia, signed 26 November 2016 and 28 November 2018 respectively. Neither agreement is considered to be a legally binding agreement nor an act of government, yet both agreements represent a commitment made by Lega Nord and FPO to pursue a consistent degree of cooperation with United Russia. Both agreements are nearly identical in their provisions, which, according to Anton Shekhovtsov, hints that neither agreement was 'negotiated' as much as they were delivered by United Russia to Lega Nord and FPO[4].

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3 L. Abramishvili, *So-called Presidential Elections Carried out in Abkhazia, Far-right German Politicians Present as 'Observers',* "Messenger", 27 August 2019
[http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/4469_august_27_2019/4469_edit.html access: 17 August 2019].

4 A. Shekhovtsov, *Austrian and Italian Far-right Parties Signed Coordination and Cooperation Agreements with Putin's "United Russia",* "Tango Noir", 04 June 2018
[https://www.tango-noir.com/2018/06/04/austrian-and-italian-far-right-parties-signed-coordination-and-cooperation-agreements-with-putins-united-russia/ access: 30 August 2019].

Rassemblement National

Many high ranking officials within ID's constituent parties have also maintained close personal relationships with the Russian government and various political figures, which often includes financial support provided via Russian banks or business ventures of questionable legality. One of the most prominent figures in ID with such connections is Marine Le Pen, the head of RN. As a fixture of the French far right, Le Pen's open Euroscepticism and anti-American rhetoric aligned greatly with strategic interests of the Russian Federation. With roughly 11 million Euros of total funding provided by a Russian bank by 2014[5], Le Pen's admiration of Putin turned to open support and praise for the regime, including statements in support of Russia's intervention in Crimea[6] and dismissing critics of Putin's governance in the Western world[7]. This culminated in several visits to Moscow, such as a meeting with the Russian government members in 2015[8] and a meeting with Vladimir Putin during the lead-up to the 2017 French presidential election[9].

Lega

A similar pattern is seen with Matteo Salvini, the head of Lega Nord and former Italian interior minister. While there is no definitive proof that he has personally met with Putin, Salvini has remained in contact with individuals in the Russian government and open about his admiration for Putin's Russia. This includes a visit to Russian-occupied Crimea in 2018 during his time as interior minister of Italy[10], which violated both Ukrainian and European laws regarding travel to the territory. Salvini had also accompanied Gianluca Savoini – a prominent figure in Europe's far-right network – on at least 31 separate trips to Moscow between 2014 and 2019. Although Salvini has provided vague answers regarding the reason for these trips, investigative journalism by Bellingcat and other sources uncovered a clandestine plan to funnel money into Lega Nord through a dubious Russian energy deal.

Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs

The Austrian Freedom Party's recent 'Ibiza scandal' represents one of most visible

5   L. Rosenberger, *Russia's Promotion of Illiberal Populism: Tools, Tactics, Networks,* German Marshall Fund of the United States, 11 March 2019
     [https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/021925_russia_populism_-_rosenberger1_0.pdf access: 02 September 2019].

6   C. Demesay, *"There Are Always Two Sides to the Truth": French Susceptibility to Russian Propaganda,* German Council on Foreign Relations – Kompakt Nr. 4, February 2016.

7   H. Fouquet, *Le Pen Says Putin's U.S. Critics out of Touch with Modern Russia,* "Bloomberg", 18 July 2018
     [https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-18/le-pen-says-putin-s-u-s-critics-out-of-touch-with-modern-russia access: 02 September 2019].

8   G. Baczynska, *French Far-right Leader Marine Le Pen in Moscow amid Ukraine Tensions,* "Reuters", 26 May 2015
     [https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-france-lepen-idUKKBN0OB16I20150526 access: 02 September 2019].

9   A. Nossiter, *Marine Le Pen of France Meets with Vladimir Putin in Moscow,* "The New York Times", 24 March 2017
     [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/24/world/europe/marine-le-pen-of-france-meets-with-putin-in-moscow.html access: 29 August 2019].

10   *Commuting to Moscow: Lega Nord's Pilgrimage to Russia,* "Bellingcat", 08 August 2019
     [https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2019/08/08/commuting-to-moscow-lega-nords-pilgrimage-to-russia/ access: 29 August 2019].

examples of Russian clandestine financing of the European far right[11]. A woman posing as Alyona Makarova, a niece of oligarch Igor Makarov, met with members of FPO (including party leader Heinz-Christian Strache) in Ibiza[12]. In an exchange recorded on video, members of FPO and Makarova's associates are seen negotiating means of assistance for the then opposition party. In exchange for positive media coverage, members of FPO would be willing to provide a series of government contracts to Russian firms should they enter government. The revelation of the footage led to a vote of no confidence and the collapse of the ruling coalition between FPO and the Austrian People's Party.

Alternative für Deutschland

As a vocal opponent of the sanctions against the Russian Federation, the Alternative for Germany has also established questionable connections to political actors in the Russian Federation. In a potential violation of the German law restricting MPs from receiving amounts of funding greater than 1,000 Euros from donors outside the European Union, AfD members Frauek Petry, Marcus Pretzell, and Julian Flak were taken on a 25,000 Euro charter flight to Moscow for a private meeting with various members of the Russian government[13]. The delegation did refer to the visit as an opportunity to discuss cooperation with the Russian government,

raising questions as to the nature of this cooperation and whatever other potential financial interests may be involved.

In addition, an investigative report from Der Spiegel has shown an overt connection between AfD parliamentarian Markus Frohnmaier and Russian political actors. Frohnmaier had not only been in regular contact with Russian officials during his time as an MP (including a visit to Yalta, occupied Crimea, among other trips to Russia[14]) but has also seemingly been under the direct influence of the Russian government. This includes efforts by the Russian foreign ministry to develop an action plan in support of Frohnmaier's campaign during the lead-up to his election campaign. Additionally, Frohnmaier was in contact with journalist and AfD associate Manuel Ochsenreiter, who was implicated in organising the firebombing of a Hungarian cultural centre in western Ukraine by a Polish man[15].

The Implications of Identity and Democracy's Presence in the European Parliament for the EU-Ukraine Relations

Committee Obstruction

There are several implications for the EU-Ukraine relations that come from ID's presence in the European Parliament. The most likely possibility is that ID will use

11 P. Oltermann, *Austria's 'Ibiza Scandal': What Happened and Why Does It Matter?,* "The Guardian", 20 May 2019 [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/20/austria-ibiza-scandal-sting-operation-what-happened-why-does-it-matter accessed: 06 October 2019].

12 *Scandal Fells the Vice-chancellor of Austria,* "Economist", 18 May 2019 [https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/05/18/scandal-fells-the-vice-chancellor-of-austria].

13 J.-M. Hauteville, *Russia trip exposes AfD ties to Moscow,* "Handelsblatt", 30 May 2019, [https://www.handelsblatt.com/today/politics/russian-collusion-russia-trip-exposes-afd-ties-to-moscow/23582296.html?ticket=ST-21477777-b7Zv7sxuznAWfQ15ffKV-ap6 access 01 September 2019]

14 T. Jones, *German AfD Parliamentarian Could Be under Russian Influence: Report,* "Deutsche Welle", 04 April 2019 [https://www.dw.com/en/german-afd-parliamentarian-could-be-under-russian-influence-report/a-48221119 access: 19 August 2019].

15 B. Knight, *AfD Worker Accused of Ordering Arson Attack in Ukraine,* "Deutsche Welle", 15 January 2019 [https://www.dw.com/en/afd-worker-accused-of-ordering-arson-attack-in-ukraine/a-47093618 access: 01 September 2019].

their presence in the European Parliament to block or delay efforts by the European Parliament to condemn actions by the Russian Federation. Such obstruction may be most effectively achieved through the party's presence in the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

❝ *ID will use their presence in the European Parliament to block or delay efforts by the European Parliament to condemn actions by the Russian Federation*

In spring 2019, the European Parliament passed a resolution 'State of EU-Russia Relations'[16] drafted in 2018 and based on a resolution by the same name passed in 2015[17]. Both resolutions condemned the annexation of Crimea and the continued destabilisation efforts by the Russian Federation in Donbas, with the later resolution drawing particular attention to political prisoners and Ukrainian detainees held in the Russian Federation. In both cases, the resolutions were subjected to a vote in the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee before proceeding to a vote in a wider plenary session. In 2015, the resolution condemning Russia's actions gained 53 votes in favour, with 10 in opposition and three abstentions. In 2019, the updated resolution gained just 27 in favour, with four in opposition and 15 abstentions. These two votes were conducted by the eighth European Parliament, in which the far-right precursor to ID (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy) had no formal representation in the foreign affairs committee.

Today, five members of Identity and Democracy sit in the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs. Compared to the complete absence of Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy in the previous session of the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee, the holding of just below 10% of the committee's seats represents a major progression of the far right's potential influence on the parliament's foreign affairs committee, particularly considering the complete lack of representation in the previous parliament. Should another resolution to condemn Russia's actions arise in the committee, a small but dedicated opposing bloc combined with dissenting MEPs from larger parties and a wider group of abstentions may potentially be enough to avoid the passage of the resolution and avoid a vote in a plenary session.

Advocacy of Interparliamentary Cooperation

Additionally, ID may pursue a series of strategic votes that would seemingly legitimise the idea of resuming political cooperation with the Russian Federation, diminishing the initial harshness of the European Union's condemnation of Russian activities following Euromaidan. This may be achieved through gestures such as reactivation of the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. Formally deactivated in accordance with the European Union's sanctions policy following the annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas[18], in recent years the

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16 European Parliament, *On EU-Russia Relations* (2018), European Parliament, 02 February 2019 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2019-0073_EN.html access: 03 September 2019].

17 European Parliament, *On EU-Russia Relations* (2015), European Parliament, 03 May 2015 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2015-0162_EN.html access: 03 September 2019].

18 VIPCO, *Delegation to the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee,* "Jean Monet Network PACO" [https://ghum.kuleuven.be/ggs/research/paco/vipco-1/vipco-factsheet-europe-delegation-eu-russia-pcc.pdf access: 29 August 2019].

parliamentary cooperation committee had primarily acted as a forum for discussion of the EU-Russia relations and communication with non-government members of the Russian society.

> **" Additionally, ID may pursue a series of strategic votes that would seemingly legitimise the idea of resuming political cooperation with the Russian Federation, diminishing the initial harshness of the European Union's condemnation of Russian activities following Euromaidan**

Although reactivation of the committee would not have an immediate adverse effect on Ukraine, it would diminish the severity brought upon by its original deactivation and potentially appeal to MEPs from mainstream parties who have articulated a need for reconciliation and rebuilding of ties with Russia. For instance, during the debate on the 2019 'State of the EU-Russia Relations', an amendment to the resolution calling for the reinstatement of the parliamentary cooperation committee was put forth by the Green Party and other liberal parties[19], along with Sabine Lösing (European United Left/Nordic Green Left) and Helmut Scholz (Die Linke) issuing a minority opinion referencing the need for energy cooperation, dialogue with the Eurasian Economic Union, and the lifting of sanctions placed against individual parliamentarians from the Russian Federation in order to foster dialogue[20].

While it is separate from the institutions of the European Union, the recent vote by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to restore voting rights of the Russian Federation's delegation is an example of the gradual easing of the political countermeasures deployed after 2014. Voting rights for the Russian members to PACE were initially suspended following the annexation of Crimea and continued due to the downing of flight MH17 and Russia's continued military activities in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. After Moscow's threatening to exit the organisation, despite not following any of the PACE concerns, the parliamentary assembly voted for the de facto restoration of voting rights to the Russian delegation (even that official voting was for changes in the sanctions mechanism). With parliamentarians from mainstream parties of the European Union in PACE voting in support of the reinstitution of Russia's voting rights, the idea of ID gaining wider support in pushing for the resumption of interparliamentary dialogue between the European Parliament and Russian Duma seems plausible, and would likely be considered a political victory in Moscow's efforts to repeal political sanctions.

Opposition to the European-Ukrainian Integration

Similar to the foreign affairs committee, it is possible that ID and a collection of dissenting MEPs from mainstream parties and non-inscrits (MEPs with no party or coalition affiliation in the European Parliament) could disrupt a treaty or legislation in support of Ukraine. While this is rather unlikely given that such a document would already have the backing of other

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19 A. Brzozowski, *Russia Can't Be Considered Strategic Partner of EU Anymore, MEPs Say,* "Euractiv", 13 March 2019 [https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/russia-cant-be-considered-strategic-partner-of-eu-anymore-meps-say/ = access: 28 August 2019].

20 *State of EU-Russia Political Relations – Minority Opinion,* European Parliament, 02 August 2019 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2019-0073_EN.html#title2 access: 25 August 2019].

bodies of the European Union and passed a smaller vote in the foreign affairs committee, it is still another opportunity to derail any further development in the EU-Ukraine relations. In such a scenario, members of ID would likely argue that Ukraine has failed to make progress on upholding the Minsk Agreements, or that persistent corruption has shown the EU's reform efforts to be naught. Regardless of the validity of these statements, this posturing could potentially appeal to MEPs outside of ID whose perspectives are in line with the 'Ukraine fatigue'[21] seen elsewhere in the European Union[22].

> **For Ukrainian policymakers, a viable strategy in mitigating the potential complications that would stem from ID's presence in the European Parliament is to focus on the more technocratic elements of the EU-Ukraine relations that have already been ratified and approved**

Instead, members of ID could frame the EU's interests in the former Soviet Union as a zero-sum game, where abandoning the European-Ukrainian integration is the price for pursuing diplomatic and political rapprochement with the Russian Federation – a larger, more crucial partner for the European Union that leaders of ID feel had been unjustly punished for its actions in Crimea[23]. Regardless of whether any actual rapprochement is pursued afterwards, evoking this framing could potentially be

enough to derail a critical vote in a plenary session on a treaty of great importance to Ukraine's relationship with the EU.

This would be especially relevant should the European Commission and EEAS present the parliament with a treaty related to the more technocratic elements of Ukraine's European integration, such as the creation of a bilateral customs union similar to that between the EU and Turkey. In such a case, agreements that are built on extensive dialogue between Brussels and Kyiv and the Ukrainian bureaucratic reform could be weighed against short-term political interests, introducing an element of uncertainty unrelated to the pace and progress of reform efforts.

Going Forward: Ukraine-EU Relations in the Ninth European Parliament

For Ukrainian policymakers, a viable strategy in mitigating the potential complications that would stem from ID's presence in the European Parliament is to focus on the more technocratic elements of the EU-Ukraine relations that have already been ratified and approved, such as the complete implementation of the contents of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, continuing anti-corruption reforms, and remaining open to negotiations and cooperation in regard to a potential ceasefire in Donbas. Additionally, as a sovereign state Ukraine should have no hesitations in pursuing legal actions against MEPs who travel to Crimea or the occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions without proper authorisation.

21 D. Patrikarakos, *The West's 'Ukraine Fatigue'*, "Politico", 25 September 2015
    [https://www.politico.eu/article/the-wests-dangerous-ukraine-fatigue/ access: 05 September 2019].

22 O. Vasina, *Exclusive: EU Scraps Border Projects as 'Ukraine Fatigue' Grows,* "Reuters", 20 February 2018
    [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-eu-grants-exclusive/exclusive-eu-scraps-border-projects-as-ukraine-fatigue-grows-idUSKCN1G41GT access: 05 October 2019].

23 *France's Marine Le Pen Urges End to Russia Sanctions,* "BBC Worldnews", 24 March 2017
    [https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39375969 access: 03 October 2019].

While not entirely insignificant, ID's presence in the European Parliament is still relegated to the margins of the body. Coupled with the recent implosion of FPO and Lega's coalition governments and increasing attention paid to Russian influence in European politics by journalists, law enforcement, and intelligence, the sustainability of this reactionary wing is questionable. Even with its swell to 10% of the parliament, ID's presence fails to live up to the originally forecasted populist wave and would be dependent on significant dissention from more mainstream parties to sufficiently block legislation.

Additionally, with the executive organs of the EU being the only sources of legislature, as long as one member of the European Council remains opposed to a grand rapprochement with the Russian Federation, then it is highly unlikely that ID would be able to deliver on its pro-Russian sentiments in a constructive way. Instead, the coalition will have to direct its efforts towards the disruption of any attempts to improve the EU-Ukraine relations and hope that its presence in the Committee on Foreign Affairs would be enough to divert attention towards the possibility of rapprochement with Russia.

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ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES: ANOTHER POINT OF NO RETURN?

Sergiy Gerasymchuk
Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism"

The article focuses on outcomes of the elections in the Republic of Moldova that took place on 24 February 2019, coalition negotiations between the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM), Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), and ACUM bloc (which includes the Party of Action and Solidarity led by Maia Sandu and the Dignity and Truth Party of Andrei Nastase), final composition of the government and its impact on the Moldovan political agenda. The author argues that the key outcome of the elections is sort of a 'hybrid coalition' between explicitly pro-Western and explicitly pro-Russian forces that eventually may lead Moldova to a geopolitical deadlock.

It is typical for Eastern Europe that elections play a crucial role in defining foreign policy agenda of a country. The traditional division into rightist, leftist, and centrist political parties is often substituted by pro-Western and pro-Russian party division.

When the author was discussing the 2019 elections in the Republic of Moldova, most of his Moldovan vis-à-vis, who represented civil society and expert community, stressed that the 2019 elections will be a point of no return for the Republic of Moldova in terms of its foreign policy orientation. After decades of Moldovan attempts to find a 'third way' and a balance between the EU and Russia, the elections of 2019 had to outline the true preferences of the Moldovan voters and to define either a pro-Russian or pro-Western vector of the Moldovan foreign policy.

The political forces competing for the votes of the Moldovan electorate were split into three segments. The ACUM bloc headed by Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase was positioning itself as an explicitly pro-Western political force. ACUM was focusing on the necessity of pro-Western reforms, fighting corruption, counterweighing oligarchic regime in the Republic of Moldova.

Contrary to that, the PSRM and the President of Moldova Igor Dodon were rather supporting stronger relations with Russia and Russia-led integration projects, e.g. the Eurasian Union.[1] The PSRM attitude towards

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1 *Moldova's Dodon: EU Uncertainty Highlights Need to Keep Close Russia Ties,* "Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty", 22 February 2019
[https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-dodon-eu-uncertainty-ties-russia/29784171.html access: 04 October 2019].

the oligarchs was ambivalent. Although being de-facto engaged in cooperation with the DPM, known for representing interests of the Moldovan oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc, the PSRM preserved space for manoeuvre by exploiting populist slogans. The PSRM also expected that this approach might eventually even result in their majority in the Moldovan parliament. If this scenario would have come true, President Igor Dodon could have achieved the power that only President Vladimir Voronin had had in Moldova from 2001 until 2009, when Communist majority in the parliament secured support for all his initiatives.

In its turn, the DPM was declaring pro-Western orientation and was trying to justify its activities by exploiting a threatening narrative of a pro-Russian revenge, but the image of its leader Vlad Plahotniuc, often blamed for corruption, falling living standards, and the erosion of democracy in Moldova, was putting into question the credibility of such declarations and caused suspicion of the European leaders.

Optimists, mostly those engaged in campaigning in favour of the ACUM bloc, expected that the elections might bring into power the leaders of vocally pro-Western ACUM bloc and that would inevitably bring Moldova on the European path. However, such optimism was groundless and was not perceived as a feasible option.

When in February 2019 it became clear that no party secured a majority, it manifested that not the results of the elections but the composition of the governmental coalition and the respective government will be the indicator of geopolitical choice of Moldova in the future.

Most Probable Scenarios That Never Became Implemented

The most probable scenario of the coalition composition, judging from the comments of Moldovan politicians and political observers, was an alliance between the PSRM and DPM. Both political forces had common formal ideological background belonging to the Socialist International and, what is more, had a record of cooperation in the past during ad hoc voting in the parliament.

This scenario was also facilitated by the majoritarian-proportional electoral system that had been introduced despite the EU recommendations[2] by joint efforts of the DPM and the PSRM. The DPM controlled the defence and law enforcement agencies as well as had influence on most city mayors in Moldova and therefore had good chances to apply administrative resources for ensuring high electoral results. In its turn, with failures of the pro-European political forces and corruption-related scandals, as well as due to increased pro-Russian sentiments among Moldovan citizens, the PSRM had chances to improve its record of popularity and benefit from proportional elections.

On the one hand, this scenario could have ensured strength of the government and state institutions by securing strong majority in the parliament. On the other hand, such approach could have resulted in isolation of Moldova and in deterioration in the relations with the EU (neither Igor Dodon nor Vlad Plahotniuc managed to ensure close cooperation with the EU leadership), whereas opposing political parties from the ACUM bloc would have been shifted to the margins of Moldovan politics.

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2 *Council Conclusions on the Republic of Moldova,* Council of the European Union, Foreign Affairs Council, 26 February 2019
[http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6280-2018-INIT/en/pdf access: 04 October 2019].

However, surprisingly, such a coalition was rejected by both the DPM and the PSRM. Furthermore, the DPM reached out to the ACUM bloc to form a coalition government, aiming to promote its ties with the West and even offered ACUM the position of the prime minister in the future coalition, yet also without success.

On 7 and 8 June 2019, the Moldovan Constitutional Court (allegedly controlled by the DPM) issued a controversial decision that new parliamentary elections had to be held if no government was formed by a three-month (90 consecutive days) deadline starting from its validation of the election results on 9 March. Arguably, being unable to keep the situation under control, Plahotniuc by this move attempted to reload the parliament.

The most probable outcome of such a scenario could have been a deep political crisis in domestic politics. Foreign policy could have undergone 'stagnation'. Neither the EU nor Russia was interested in interacting with an invalid government whose decisions could have been challenged by successors. As it was demonstrated by previous crises in the Republic of Moldova (due to incapability of the parliament to elect the president in 2009–2012, the president had the 'acting' status), such waiting for a political resolution could have run over time.

All these circumstances alongside with the pressure from external players both in the East and in the West caused the creation of a barely expected 'hybrid' coalition between ACUM and the PSRM. A 'temporary political agreement' was signed on 8 June by the leadership of these political forces enabling the formation of a parliamentary coalition and launching of the government established

to fight corruption. The governing coalition also declared its key objective – to 'de-oligarchise' state institutions that would now operate in the interest of the Moldovan people.

Weak attempts of the DPM to remain in power and to compete with the government of Maia Sandu failed. The cautious approach of Ukraine and Romania (both Ukrainian special envoy Viktor Kryzhanivsky and the advisor to the President of Romania Bogdan Aurescu visited Moldova and allegedly tried to set a dialogue among the DPM, PSRM, and ACUM) was neglected by both Moldovan political players and their Western partners, as well as by Russia. When the leader of the DPM left the country for an undisclosed destination[3], there was no one to question the legitimacy of Maia Sandu's government. Both Ukraine and Romania despite the political cautiousness and despite being rather hesitant to accept legitimacy of the new government also followed the approach of the bigger players: the US, the EU, and Russia.

Pros of the 'Hybrid Coalition'

Since the very moment of its emerging, the coalition of the PSRM and ACUM (formed on 8 June) was perceived both internally and at the international level as a temporary and a tactical one. The key message of the signed cooperation agreement was based on passing the so-called 'captured state' legislative package. The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova denounced 'the current oligarchic regime, led by Vladimir Plahotniuc, leader of the Democratic Party, guilty of unlawful and unconstitutional control over the Office of the Prosecutor General, the judiciary system, National Anticorruption Centre, National Integrity Authority,

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3 M. Necsutu, *Moldova Faces New Turmoil After ex-Leader Leaves,* "Balkan Insight", 17 June 2019 [https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/17/moldova-faces-new-turmoil-after-ex-leader-leaves/ access: 04 October 2019].

Central Electoral Commission, Security and Intelligence Service, National Bank of Moldova, and other authorities, which must operate autonomously, independently from the political factor, being democratically monitored; established that the Democratic Party under Vladimir Plahotniuc acted as a party of totalitarian expression, abusing the public funds to promote projects in their own interests, institutions, positions, and law enforcement to intimidated and eliminated political opponents and to apply political corruption through blackmail and bribery; condemned endemic corruption – the main threat to the freedom, security, and well-being of the Republic of Moldova and its citizens; found that there is a particularly severe situation in the areas of justice, safeguarding and protection of human rights and attested a profound deterioration of basic standards of the civil rights and freedoms, including degrading treatment, torture and abusive deportation of political asylum seekers.'[4] Basically, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova blamed Vlad Plahotniuc for using the state as a tool for his personal enrichment and exploiting state agencies for assuring his personal power.

The parliament found the support of key external players, which can be summarised by the Council of Europe statement in this regard. The statement said that the Council of Europe 'praised the resilience and restrain of the Moldovan people during this crisis […] noted that people have great expectations that the new coalition will change the functioning of democratic institutions […] urged the authorities to bear in mind that the legal steps taken today to "de-oligarchise" the country will have long-term effects and should therefore ultimately contribute to consolidating state institutions, strengthening their independence and ensuring that new legislation and its implementation comply with Council of Europe standards'.[5]

Most of the actors involved appreciated the pragmatic agreement, based on the definition of common political objectives. At the first glance, indeed, the distribution of power looked balanced within the newly established governing coalition. ACUM gained five out of 11 parliamentary commission chairs. At the same time, the cabinet of ministers included mostly ACUM nominees, whereas Maia Sandu became prime minister and Andrei Nastase became vice prime minister and minister of interior.

However, even a brief look into the details proves that the PSRM has also gained a lot, including, for example, the parliament speaker's position. While a government can be overthrown with a simple majority vote (51 votes), two-thirds (61 votes) of the 101 votes in parliament are needed to change the speaker.

As rightly mentioned by Vlad Socor,[6] the net result was a consensus between the coalition's components for Moldova to resume its European course that

4   *Declaration on Recognition of the Captive Character of the Republic of Moldova Voted by the Parliament of Moldova on 8th of June 2019,* ACUM, 08 June 2019
    [https://acum.md/statement-on-recognition-of-the-captive-character-of-the-republic-of-moldova/ access: 03 October 2019].

5   *PACE Co-rapporteurs: 'De-oligarchising' the Republic of Moldova Should Aim at Consolidating State Institutions,* PACE, 27 July 2019
    [http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=7586&lang=2&cat=3 access: 04 October 2019].

6   V. Socor, *Moldova's 'Hybrid' Governing Coalition: Physiognomy, Goals, Prospects,* "Eurasia Daily Monitor", Vol. 16, No. 114, 07 August 2019
    [https://jamestown.org/program/moldovas-hybrid-governing-coalition-physiognomy-goals-prospects-part-two/ access: 04 October 2019].

Plahotniuc's system, arguably, had halted. At the level of declarations, the European course was understood in ways that insulate it from 'geopolitics' (although it looks rather as wishful thinking more than a pragmatic approach). It entailed the rule of law, implementation of the EU Association Agreement (including legislative harmonisation with the EU as well as European standards of governance and public administration), an attractive business environment, and locking Moldova into the EU's economic space (this latter goal is an accomplished fact due to the DCFTA[7], although not in itself an indicator of Europeanisation).

So far, it is fair to admit that both parties to the coalition avoid any vocal confrontation with a view to the local elections, which are scheduled to be held in Moldova in autumn 2019. Prime Minister Maia Sandu expects the 'hybrid coalition' to last for a year at least. President Dodon's plans are much more ambitious and he expects up to four years of co-existence with ACUM, so as to share responsibility for the likely unpopular economic reforms and the attendant social costs.

Coalition's Pitfalls

The enthusiasm of President Dodon is understandable and can be explained by the fact that he is the one who benefitted most from the failure of Plahotniuc's regime as well as the creation of the 'hybrid coalition'. In addition to the speaker's position, there are a few political positions in the government that belong to his quota, e.g. the vice prime minister for Transnistrian settlement and the defence minister. Dodon's advisers received both these positions.

Moreover, if under Plahotniuc's de-facto rule the role of the president of Moldova was limited to ceremonial, the new coalition assigned to him authority that the previous parliament had rejected, including a right to appoint the intelligence service chief. Besides, the coalition also gave the National Security Council, an advisory and consultative body chaired by the head of state, a right to subpoena secret documents.[8] All these appointments and changes provide Igor Dodon with real leverages of influence, in particular in the area of reintegration of the Republic of Moldova and in the security field. Furthermore, even in case of government's failure and collapse of the coalition, Speaker of the Parliament Zinaida Greceanii will remain in place.

> *At the level of declarations, the European course was understood in ways that insulate it from 'geopolitics' (although it looks rather as wishful thinking more than a pragmatic approach)*

Another achievement of President Dodon and his team is appointment of a member of the PSRM team as the head of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova.[9] Earlier, the president's attempts to block governmental decisions resulted in his

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7   The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) are free trade areas established by the EU with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

8   V. Socor (n 6).

9   *Ex-Ambassador in Russia Headed Constitutional Court in Moldova,* "Evropeyska Pravda", 19 August 2019 [https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/news/2019/08/19/7099825/ access: 04 October 2019].

numerous suspensions in accordance with the Constitutional Court rulings. However, having a person loyal to his political force as the head of the Constitutional Court gives the president of Moldova certain guarantees of immunity and assures his 'veto' right. Generalising, in case the government and the president will get into disputes, the president may either end the coalition or block the governmental decision without significant risk to be suspended by the Constitutional Court.

On the top of all that, President Dodon also got a chance to improve his reputation significantly. The anti-corruption bodies of the Republic of Moldova have already whitewashed the reputation of the PSRM claiming there is no evidence of the Socialists being financed by the Russian Federation[10] the respective accusations had been voiced by the team of Vlad Plahotniuc during the June crisis in the Republic of Moldova[11]).

In addition, the PSRM will be able to receive further bonuses. For the general public and international community, the coalition consisting of the Socialists and pro-EU opposition will have signs of an inclusive government coalition that will look like an effort to overcome social polarisation and will demonstrate readiness of the PSRM for political dialogue with former opponents. What is more, representatives of the PSRM can speculate that it was their good will that paved the way for Maia Sandu as the head of the government and their contribution to the failure of Vlad Plahotniuc was essential. These speculations may eventually propel the support of the electorate to the PSRM and in case of snap elections they may get even more votes than in the beginning of 2019. Also, President Dodon can utilize these arguments in 2020 during the presidential campaign, when he will bid for his second term.

Although the leaders of the ACUM-PSRM coalition avoid discussing geopolitical implications of their tandem, it is clear that Russia is also among the beneficiaries of the deal. Kamil Calus correctly points out that 'the Russian government wanted to present itself primarily as a pragmatic actor, which is both willing to cooperate with its Western partners and essential to resolving the important problems in the post-Soviet area'[12]. This approach is also supported by some Western scholars[13], who admit that the focus has shifted to the speed and effectiveness of the so-called de-oligarchisation process. Optimists believe that this would entail cleaning state institutions, the judiciary, and practices associated with the corrupt regime patronised by Vlad Plahotniuc. However, even most optimistic researchers still agree that being strongly focused on anti-corruption and European integration, the ACUM bloc will likely face some resistance from their more populist, pro-Russian coalition partner.[14]

10 *Prosecutor's Office Checked the Video, in Which Dodon Confirmed Socialist Party Was financed from Russian Federation,* "Evropeyska Pravda", 23 September 2019 [https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/news/2019/09/23/7101069/ access: 04 October 2019].

11 *Videoproof 3. Dodon Received Money Transfers from Russia,* "PublikaMD", 09 June 2019 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XyChe0PqCw access: 04 October 2019].

12 K. Calus, *End of the Dual Government in Moldova,* "OSW", 17 June 2019 [https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2019-06-17/end-dual-government-moldova access: 04 October 2019].

13 L. Allin, B. Jarabik, *Draining the Moldovan Swamp,* Wilson Center, A blog of the Kennan Institute, 21 June 2019 [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/draining-the-moldovan-swamp access: 04 October 2019].

14 C. Rebegea, *The Long Road Ahead for Moldova,* CEPA, 03 July 2019 [https://www.cepa.org/no-euphoria-in-chisinau access: 04 October 2019].

Russian Long-term Strategy

Prior to the parliamentary elections in Moldova, Russia's destructive activities (in Eastern Europe and in Moldova itself) caused particular concern and required significant attention. As an interested and arrogant external player, Moscow has been acting dynamically to get total control over Chisinau and was looking for a pretext to interfere in the country's internal processes. Although during the June crisis Russia tried to persuade the West that it wants to be an honest broker and a constructive player, Moldova was and remains among geopolitical targets of Russia's neo-imperial 'russkiy mir' policy in Eastern Europe. Russia's attitude towards Moldova likely will remain offensive and oriented towards regaining geopolitical control over Moldova.

> ❝ *Moscow expects to regain such control primarily through bringing pro-Russian forces into power in Moldova and their radical change of the course of Moldova's state policy in accordance with the objectives of the Russian foreign policy*

It is fair to assume that Moscow expects to regain such control primarily through bringing pro-Russian forces into power in Moldova and their radical change of the course of Moldova's state policy in accordance with the objectives of the Russian foreign policy. The existing 'hybrid' coalition is also perceived by the Kremlin as a tactical and an interim one. However, while in the West there are expectations that the coalition aims at reforming the country, Moscow perceives it as a tool for strengthening Igor Dodon and the PSRM by legal and legitimate means. When their power will be

assured, Russia, most likely, will increase its interference with the internal processes in Moldova. If ACUM creates crucial obstacles to the Kremlin's plans, Moscow will become more and more brutal.

Observations (strengthened power of Dodon and the PSRM, their chances to improve the record at the local and parliamentary elections as well as during the 2020 presidential campaign) prove that the current strategy taken up by Moscow with regard to Chisinau is of upstream nature and goes from subtle through moderate (within political dialogue and based on democratic and legal procedures) to a rude (pressing, destabilising, 'revolutionary') and even explicit coercive intervention with the view to capturing power by pro-Russian forces and further planting of the 'russkiy mir' paradigm.

These risks should not be overlooked and cannot be ignored by the representatives of pro-Western forces in the Republic of Moldova and by their partners in the US and in the EU. Otherwise indeed the interim 'hybrid' coalition may pave the way not only to de-oligarchisation of the Moldovan state but also to its dismantling in favour of Russian interests in the region. If it happens, then finally it will be a point of no return for the Republic of Moldova.

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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS-2019 AND POSTELECTION CRISIS IN MOLDOVA: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR UKRAINE

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Parliamentary elections of 2019 in the Republic of Moldova became a turning point in modern history of this country. The winners' inability to form a coalition and a government led to a political crisis, which was resolved by creating an alliance of two political forces with diametrically opposite political positions – the pro-Russian Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and pro-European political bloc ACUM. These political opponents united against the ruling Democratic Party of Moldova and its leader, tycoon Vladimir Plahotniuc. The crisis was resolved thanks to a common position of main external actors – the USA, Russia, and the European Union. This created a fundamentally new reality not only for Moldova but also for Ukraine. There was the actualization of old challenges, including Moldovan pro-Russian forces' return to power and the creation of conditions for the Transnistrian settlement according to the Russian model.

Parliamentary Elections and June Crisis

On 24 February 2019, parliamentary elections took place in Moldova. For the first time, the elections to the legislature were held under a mixed system: 50 MPs were elected by party lists, 51 by single-seat constituencies. Fifteen political parties and blocs took part in these elections. Under the current law, political parties had to overcome the 6% barrier to be elected to the parliament, and electoral blocs – the 8% barrier.

The introduction of the mixed system was beneficial to the ruling Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM), which had been losing popularity due to corruption scandals. PDM leader – tycoon Vladimir Plahotniuc – became a kind of embodiment of corruption and misconduct, concentrating all the negatives of a party rule. In fact, PDM had controlled not only the parliament and the government, but also the Constitutional Court (CC), judiciary, and law enforcement of Moldova.

A major electoral struggle unfolded between three leading political forces: the ruling PDM, the pro-Russian and pro-presidential Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), and the pro-European ACUM bloc, which was formed by two political parties – Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) and Dignity and Truth Platform Party (DA).

As a result of the parliamentary elections, the PSRM won 35 seats in the parliament, and the Democratic Party of Moldova received 30 seats. The political bloc ACUM took the third place, with 26 seats. 'Şor' Party won seven seats. Also three independent candidates were elected[1].

None of the political parties received a majority sufficient to form the government. For three months, negotiations on the establishment of a governing coalition had been unsuccessful. Both the Socialists and ACUM had stated their reluctance to form a coalition with the Democratic Party.

Only on 08 June 2019, the creation of a new majority coalition between the PSRM and the bloc ACUM was announced. A new coalition government was announced. Representative of the PSRM, Zinaida Greceanii, was elected the parliament speaker; Maya Sandu, the leader of the Action and Solidarity Party, became the prime minister, and Andrei Nastase, the leader of the Dignity and Truth Platform Party, became the deputy prime minister and minister of the interior.

PDM and its leader Vladimir Plahotniuc, who was still in power in Moldova, did not like this option. On 07 June, the day before the coalition was formed, the Democrat-controlled Constitutional Court ruled that three months allowed for forming a coalition should be calculated from the date of the MPs' mandate approval – 09 March. After three months, according to the constitution, the president has a right to dissolve the parliament. However, the Constitutional Court did not clearly set a date and only the next day, on 08 June, explained that the last day for forming a new government was 07 June 2019. It also declared Zinaida

Greceanii's election as the speaker of the parliament unconstitutional. By the same decision, the CC recognised all documents that would be adopted by the new Moldovan parliament as illegal[2].

> **For three months, negotiations on the establishment of a governing coalition had been unsuccessful. Both the Socialists and ACUM had stated their reluctance to form a coalition with the Democratic Party**

On 09 June, the Constitutional Court suspended President of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon from his office. The website of the CC reported that Igor Dodon violated the constitution by not dissolving the parliament. Powers of the president were temporarily transferred to Prime Minister Pavel Filip (Democratic Party), who also became provisionally the acting president. In his new capacity, Pavel Filip dissolved the parliament and authorised early elections on 06 September.

As a result, a dual regime was created in the country, when two governments and two presidents were in parallel, a number of government buildings were blocked by PDM supporters, and police leadership refused to obey the new government. However, the Democratic Party government gradually lost support of the external actors – the US, the EU, and the Russian Federation.

External players have played a key role in resolving the crisis in favour of the new coalition. The most significant was the position of the United States of America,

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1   *Rezultate lealegerilor au fost remise Curţii Constituţionale. Ceurmează? (The Results of the Elections Were Submitted to the Constitutional Court. What is Next?),* "Europalibera.org", 04 March 2019 [https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/29802866.html].

2   *Moldovan President Suspended, Snap Elections Called amid Deepening Crisis,* "Euronews", 09 June 2019 [https://www.euronews.com/2019/06/09/moldovan-court-relives-dodon-of-duty-as-president].

which until the very last moment hesitated to recognise the new coalition. In fact, an opinion exists that it is a visit of the US ambassador in Moldova to PDM's office in Chisinau that forced the Democrats to end resistance and to terminate the dual regime.

> **External players have played a key role in resolving the crisis in favour of the new coalition**

The reasons for the defeat of the Democratic Party were the unpopularity of this political force and of Vladimir Plahotniuc personally within Moldova, namely:

- A high level of corruption of the ruling top and actual concentration of power in the hands of Vladimir Plahotniuc's close circle;

- A high level of informal relations of high-ranking officials (kumetrizm – nepotism). In fact, Plahotniuc controlled the parliament, the government, and the judiciary. A striking example was a cancellation of Chisinau mayoral election results in June 2018, which were won by Andrei Nastase, the leader of the Dignity and Truth Platform. This provoked a negative reaction both internally and externally;

- Plahotniuc contributed to Igor Dodon's victory in the 2016 presidential elections. The Democrats' policies were aimed at positioning themselves as a single pro-European force and engaging support of the EU and the United States. From this perspective, the victory of Igor Dodon, who represents a pro-Russian vector, facilitated such a positioning, in contrast to the possible victory of pro-European Maya Sandu, but as a result, it led to the decrease of the Eurointegration dialogue in Moldova.

- Plahotniuc's entourage, including former Speaker of the Parliament Adrian Kandu, is considered to be involved in a case of withdrawing the equivalent of USD 1 billion from the banks of the Republic of Moldova.

- External partners were dissatisfied with the Democratic Party regime. It did not suit Russia because of openly anti-Russian actions. The EU was annoyed by the high level of corruption and authoritarian style of government, its failure to comply with the law. Plahotniuc had some support from the United States, which saw him as a guarantee of stability and a pro-Western course, but they were also dissatisfied with the corruption of the ruling regime.

100 Days of a 'Strange' Coalition: Strengthening Dodon's Influence

Thus, a coalition of political forces with different ideological orientations appeared in the Republic of Moldova: the pro-Russian PSRM, whose formal leader is Moldova's President Igor Dodon and the pro-European bloc ACUM. From the beginning, the leaders of these forces emphasised that their main task was 'de-oligarchisation' – removal of the state apparatus from adherents of Vladimir Plahotniuc and the Democratic Party, justice reform, and fight against corruption. They called for a moratorium on 'ideological and geopolitical differences' (Igor Dodon).

Most positions in the new government were given to ACUM, first of all, ministries responsible for economic and social dimensions. Also the pro-European parties received the post of minister of foreign affairs (Nicu Popescu).

Among the key positions received by the Party of Socialists are the deputy prime minister for reintegration (Vasile Sova) and the minister of defence (Pavel Voicu). Vasile Sova has a long diplomatic career and participated in the Transnistrian settlement

process. Prior to his appointment, he held the position of an advisor to the president of Moldova on reintegration.

As soon as the Constitutional Court of Moldova overturned its previous judgments, which laid a legal basis for the dual regime and the crisis, the legitimacy of the elected speaker of the parliament and the formed government was confirmed. Subsequently, all judges of the Constitutional Court resigned. Former PDM leader Vladimir Plahotniuc left the country. Most of PDM's and personally Plahotniuc's adherents left their positions in the governmental structures, which were taken by the coalition's representatives. The Democratic Party has lost almost all its positions and influence.

During the crisis, Ukraine took a restrained position, not openly supporting any of the parties to the conflict due to fears about a possibility of imposing a settlement model on Moldova under the Russian scenario. It is possible that this model can be applied in Ukraine in the future for the conflict settlement in Donbas. A statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on 09 June noted, 'Currently, it is important for the country and the security situation in the region to prevent external interference aimed at implementing the Russian scenario of federalization of the country'. On 12 June, Special Representative of Ukraine for Transnistrian Settlement Vyktor Kryzhanivskyy had a working visit to the Republic of Moldova, where he met with both sides.

Three months of the existence of the 'strange' coalition in Moldova showed that fears of the Ukrainian side were not unfounded. Igor Dodon was one of the main beneficiaries of Vladimir Plahotniuc's removal from power.

In the short term, he strengthened his positions in power. The coalition adopted changes to the law, which restored the president's partial control of the Information and Security Service (SIS). Later, Secretary General of the Presidential Administration Ruslan Folca was appointed as the director of the National Anti-Corruption Centre. Thus, Igor Dodon gained control of another force structure. Victor Gaiciuc, a person who expressed enthusiasm about the separatists of Donbas, became the head of the Security Council.

On 19 August, despite a negative reaction from society, a member of the parliament representing the Socialists, Vladimir Turkan, was elected the chairman of the Constitutional Court. Prime Minister Maya Sandu criticised the election, saying, 'It cannot be allowed that de-oligarchization of the state from the Plahotniuc's regime ends with the capture of an important body by any other political force, whatever it may be'. It has also emerged that the election of a PSRM representative as the chairman of the Constitutional Court was a result of certain political arrangements[3].

Although formally foreign policy is a prerogative of the ministry of foreign affairs and European integration, which is controlled by ACUM, Igor Dodon, both personally and through his Defense Minister Pavel Voicu, has the ability to influence foreign policy, in particular, relations with Russia. While ACUM representatives focused on working with Western partners, Igor Dodon and PSRM representatives were active in the East. The minister of defence of Moldova twice, in July and August, visited Russia, where he negotiated restoration of cooperation between the two countries, which had been interrupted during the

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3   Moldova intră sub Igor Dodon, asistat de blocul ACUM (Moldova Enters under Igor Dodon, Assisted by the ACUM bloc), "DW", 19 August 2019
    [https://www.dw.com/ro/moldova-intr%C4%83-sub-igor-dodon-asistat-de-blocul-acum/a-50083730].

previous leadership of the country. The president also, bypassing the government, invited Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation Sergey Shoigu to celebrate the anniversary of Moldova's 'liberation from fascism'. Formally, Shoigu's visit was 'unofficial'. But the Russian defense minister not only visited the unrecognised Transnistrian Moldovan Republic but also met with Dodon.

Despite the declared desire to avoid disagreements between coalition members over geopolitical and ideological issues and to join forces around 'de-oligarchisation' issues, there are more and more differences between coalition members on ideological questions.

> **During the crisis, Ukraine took a restrained position, not openly supporting any of the parties to the conflict due to fears about a possibility of imposing a settlement model on Moldova under the Russian scenario**

Igor Dodon took the initiative to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the 'liberation of Moldova from fascism' on 24 August. For a pro-European-oriented part of Moldovan society, this date is questionable, since the very fact of Bessarabia's accession to the USSR in 1940 is regarded as an annexation of a part of Romanian territory, which, same as the Red Army's second arrival in Moldova in 1944, was accompanied by mass repressions. In her turn, Maya Sandu

initiated a commemoration of victims of totalitarian regimes on 23 August. The idea sparked criticism from pro-Russian propagandists, who accused the prime minister of provocation.

Is There a New Plan for the Transnistrian Settlement?

Despite the fact that shortly after the formation of the coalition, both representatives of the ACUM bloc and Igor Dodon himself declared that federalisation was unacceptable for Moldova, the president began to take initiatives to politically resolve the Transnistrian conflict. He has made a number of vocal statements about prospects of the Transnistrian settlement. Thus, at the end of July, Igor Dodon emphasised that taking into account 'the internal consensus of political forces represented in the government of the country', as well as support of the current parliamentary majority by Western partners, Russia, and other external forces, he believes that the most favourable situation is emerging for a joint search for a political solution to the Transnistrian issue[4]. He later expressed his desire to meet with the president of the unrecognised Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (PMR), Igor Krasnoselsky, in autumn.

In the beginning of September, in an interview with Spiegel magazine, Dodon said, 'Transnistria in the Moldovan state will receive a special status in the form of a very strong autonomy'. According to him, the presidential administration has developed a concept that will be presented to the coalition partners[5].

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4   *Додон в День Конституции: Несмотря на трудности, Молдова состоялась как независимое государство на международной арене! (Dodon on Constitution Day: Despite Difficulties, Moldova Is Accomplished as an Independent State on the International Arena),* "KP.md", 29 July 2019
[https://www.kp.md/online/news/3554456/].

5   *President Dodon Sees Transnistria as "A Very Strong Autonomy" within Moldova,* "Infotag", 04 September 2019
[http://www.infotag.md/rebelion-en/278537/].

Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Vasile Sova recently expressed a similar idea. In an interview with the Russian news agency RIA Novosti, he stressed that in the near future a coordination mechanism would be created, which would deal with the conflict in Transnistria. Representatives of the presidential administration, parliament, government, and other agencies would take part in the process. At the same time, he said, there are no requisites for changing the format of the peacekeeping mission from a military to a civilian one[6]; this came as completely opposite to the opinion of the previous leadership of the Republic of Moldova, which emphasised the necessity to change the mission format.

> **The Shoigu's initiative for utilizing munitions in Kolbasna is the first test of the West's willingness to accept Russian rules of the game**

Igor Dodon's initiatives coincided in time with initiatives and declarations of the Russian officials. During his visit to Moldova, Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu proposed starting a process of utilizing munitions stored in a warehouse in the village of Kolbasna. According to some estimates, this warehouse, located on the territory of uncontrolled Transnistria, stores about 20,000 tons of munitions.

From the other side, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov declared principles on which Transnistrian settlement could be reached: 'special status within the Republic of Moldova, provided that Moldova retains its sovereignty, i.e. it will not be absorbed as a state and remain neutral, meaning it will not join military-political blocs'[7].

Igor Dodon's statement about willingness to give a 'very strong autonomy' to Transnistria also has provoked a negative reaction from the coalition partners. Prime Minister Maya Sandu stressed that she did not know what Mr. Dodon was talking about, as ACUM remain within their previous positions: A political solution can be found only in the context of preserving territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, with a certain autonomy of Transnistria, like Gagauzia's model[8]. Thus, in the ruling coalition, there is no common position about how to solve the Transnistrian conflict. At the same time, Transnistrian leadership continues to insist on developing independence of their unrecognised republic[9].

What Are the Challenges for Ukraine?

The development of the situation in Moldova creates additional challenges for Ukraine:

1. Strengthening of the pro-Russian forces, which can lead to a changing vector of Moldova's foreign policy: So far, despite the differences, the ruling PSRM–ACUM coalition

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6   *Власти Молдовы прокомментировали идею о замене миротворцев в Приднестровье (Moldovan Authorities Commented on the Idea of Replacing Peacekeepers in Transnistria),* "Point.md", 04 September 2019 [https://point.md/ru/novosti/politika/vlasti-moldovy-prokommentirovali-ideiu-o-zamene-mirotvortsev-v-pridnestrove].

7   *Лавров: Россия не признаёт независимость Приднестровья (Lavrov: Russia Does Not Recognise the Independence of Transnistria),* "OMG", 16 August 2019 [https://omg.md/index.php?newsid=17049].

8   *Premier Sandu Does Not Believe in Transnistrian Conflict Settlement Now,* "Infotag", 05 September 2019 [http://www.infotag.md/rebelion-en/278561/].

9   *PMR Has Proved Its Viability and Sustainability – Tiraspol Leader,* "Infotag", 02 September 2019 [http://www.infotag.md/rebelion-en/278505/].

continues to maintain unity. However, political experience gives some advantages to Igor Dodon, who strengthens his position both inside and outside the country.

As ACUM is responsible for the economic bloc of the government, the pro-European forces are more vulnerable to public criticism – which is working in favour of the Socialists. ACUM thus becomes responsible for both the curtailment of social programs that have operated under the Democratic Party and for the unpopular reforms that have to be implemented.

2. The victory of the pro-Russian forces creates additional conditions for settlement of the Transnistrian conflict under the Russian scenario. The purpose of this scenario is reintegration of the separatist region with rights to a broad autonomy, which implies coordination of the main directions of domestic and especially foreign policy. At the same time, a key goal is achieved – the progress of Moldova towards the European Union is halted, and conditions are created to prevent Moldova from joining NATO (although Moldova is a neutral country under the constitution). And most importantly, this model can become universal for conflict resolution in the post-Soviet space. First of all – in Ukraine.

The Shoigu's initiative for utilizing munitions in Kolbasna is the first test of the West's willingness to accept Russian rules of the game. Russia is trying to act as a peacemaker to get out of the sanctions regime. Given the latest sentiments in the European Union, there is a chance that Russian proposals will be welcomed in the West. At the same time, Russia does not want to withdraw its troops from Moldova and intends to dispose of only unconditional munitions.

3. Success in Moldova creates conditions for Russia's participation along with other international actors in the creation of spheres of influence, a system that can conditionally be called Yalta-2. The basis of this system, along with the existence of spheres of influence, is the possibility of deciding the fate of states without a participation of the states themselves, by the will of the 'great powers'.

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