

The Newsletter is based on the radio programme broadcast on August 10th, 2016, produced by the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova in partnership with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). The programme is broadcast on the Radio Moldova public channel. The programme is part of the FES/APE "European Integration and Foreign Policy Dialogues" Project. The content can be reproduced by mentioning the source.

NEWSLETTER

MONTHLY BULLETIN • JULY 2016 • NR.7 (125)

Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The materials are realized by Lina Grau, foreign policy expert and programme coordinator with APE.

TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. The British Ambassador to Chisinau, **Phil Batson**: Taking business out of politics is one of the major challenges for the future of the Republic of Moldova
2. Executive Director of IDIS Viitorul, **Igor Munteanu**: A federalization model would disintegrate the Republic of Moldova rather than strengthen it.
3. "Elections in Transnistria – are they going to change the situation?" – an editorial by **Ernest Vardanean**.

The last period was marked by several important events for Moldova.



At the end of July the Moldovan government reported that it met 74 of the 82 commitments under the Roadmap for the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU. The priority reforms, said the Prime Minister Pavel Filip, should be accelerated. At the same time, the representatives of the civil society are criticizing the Government for lack of consistency in fulfilling the commitments with the EU, accusing it of superficiality and simulation of reforms.



On July 1st, the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union came into force. The European Commission Vice President Federica Mogherini, expressed hope in a statement that the relations between Chisinau and Brussels will become even closer. "Together with the implementation of reforms in the country, the agreement has the potential to help changing the lives of Moldovans for the better, to bring jobs, growth and stability, says Federica Mogherini.



Johannes Hahn, the Neighbourhood Policy Commissioner, underlined that in the period of provisional application of the Association Agreement, since September 2014, the Moldovan exports to the EU increased and that the EU became the main trading partner of Moldova. "Now, fundamental changes in political and economic governance need to take place, so Moldovans can see real change. We are looking forward to real reforms on the rule of law, justice, and the independence of institutions from political pressure and on economic development. The EU is making available substantial assistance to support the implementation of the country's reform agenda", said Johannes Hahn.



On the Nistru river, near Tiraspol, joint military applications by the Russian Troops Task Force and the Transnistrian force structures took place for the first time with the infantry and tanks crossing the Nistru, where, according to legend, "there were terrorists who were neutralized with the help of a special forces assault, parachuted out of a plane." The Moldovan authorities have described the applications as "defiant and unacceptable" and demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria and transformation of the peacekeeping mission into one with international mandate.



On July 26, July Ivanna Vladkova-Hollar, the head of the IMF mission that visited Chisinau during July 5th-15th, announced that IMF signed a Staff Level Agreement with the Moldovan authorities. A final decision on the agreement, which will mean release of the external financing for Moldova, will be taken by the IMF board in October. The agreement provides for a reform programme in the banking sector and economic growth reforms that Moldova has to undertake in exchange for funding by IMF of about 179 million dollars.

On July 25th and 26th, Frank Walter Steinmeier, the German Foreign Minister and the acting chairman of OSCE paid a visit to Chisinau and Tiraspol in an attempt to convince the authorities on the two banks of the river to continue making "small steps" for confidence building, which would also lead to the drafting of a legal status for the Transnistrian region. He insisted on the implementation of the Berlin protocol on the Transnistrian settlement, and namely acceptance of the diplomas issued by the universities in Transnistria and admittance of the car license plates in the international traffic. Steinmeier also said that a special status for the Transnistrian region can be accepted only by respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova.



Phil Batson: Taking business out of politics is one of the major challenges for the future of the Republic of Moldova



The British Ambassador to Chisinau, Phil Batson, ended his mandate in Moldova and in an exclusive interview, he is explaining

why the fight against corruption and reforming the judiciary have to go beyond rhetoric and standard formulations and become a reality

for the Republic of Moldova, why the business should be separated from politics and why the European vector is the only positive way for the development of the country. Phil Batson says that removing business from politics (and vice versa) is the correct recipe to combat corruption and change people's perception about politicians.

■ **Lina Grău:** What does Brexit mean for Moldova – from the economic, political and bilateral relations points of view?

■ **Phil Batson:** The UK will continue to be key player on the global stage. As the fifth largest economy in the world, we remain a great trading nation. We have the 4th largest armed forces. We are a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and the only large country which spends both 2% of GDP on defence and 0.7% on development assistance. To maintain this we will need to be even more active and engaged as a global player. That means in Moldova too.

■ **Lina Grău:** What would be your reply to those political forces in Chisinau who bring Brexit as an argument to prove that Moldova should not follow its European path? (In the sense that if countries that have been members of the UE for so many years decide to leave the European community, why should Moldova be a part of it?)

■ **Phil Batson:** The EU is the most successful and proven model for providing economic, political and societal development. As any other entity, the EU faces challenges that it has to confront, but it has plenty

to offer, even more so to countries that are still on a tenuous path to development and modernisation. Whatever the EU looks like post-Brexit, the EU will remain one of the UK's major partners. Brexit should not deter Moldova from its European integration path and the implementation of the Association Agreement is an important step in that direction.

■ **Lina Grău:** What's the future of the British assistance for Moldova following Brexit? Some already say that UK could reduce some public expenditure.

■ **Phil Batson:** As I said earlier, if the UK wants to maintain its status as a global player – and the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have made it very clear that it does – then we need to provide assistance to countries that need it. In the last 12 months the UK has stepped up its engagement in Moldova through the Good Governance Fund – a multi-year, multi-million pound technical assistance programme. The fund seeks to tackle corruption, improve the business environment, make governments more responsive to citizens, enhance media and civil society freedoms, and promote overall reform.

■ **Lina Grău:** The Association Agreement between EU and Moldova entered into force – how tangible and real is the progress in implementing the Roadmap on Moldova-EU agreement that authorities are reporting?

■ **Phil Batson:** As ever the true test will be in the implementation. But the government and parliament have worked hard over the last few months

and should be given credit for that. But all this effort will be in vain if it has no beneficial impact on people's lives.

■ **Lina Grău:** What are the chances for the resumption of foreign funding for Moldova? When could it happen and what would be the conditions imposed by Moldova's external partners?

■ **Phil Batson:** Well, the Government has almost reached an agreement with the IMF. But there are still a few actions required on the Moldovan side, including legislative ones. All things being equal I think there's now a good chance of a resumption by the end of the year or at the beginning of 2017.

■ **Lina Grău:** The fight against corruption and justice reform – are standard formulation in European officials' when talking about Moldova. From your experience at the completion of your diplomatic mission - what is the efficiency of such speeches?

■ **Phil Batson:** Such speeches are not just from European officials – I've lost count how many times I've heard them from Moldovan politicians! I can't answer for them, but for European officials, we talk about these issues because it's the right thing to do and for two logical reasons:

- Successive Moldovan governments (including the Communists) have stated clearly that they aspire, at the very least, to modernise the country using the EU, and in more recent years, to seek full membership of the

EU. Therefore as representatives of EU countries we have a duty to set out our 'red lines', in other words the core conditions and standards that we require;

- We have our tax payers' money riding on this: no EU Ambassador can turn a blind eye to financial mismanagement, corruption in State and rule of law institutions whilst financial support is attached to cooperation.

If Moldovan politicians don't like that, then that's too bad. But we cannot spend our tax payers' money on a project if it does not pass certain, basic criteria. I don't think that's unreasonable. And that's why, for now, EU budget support has been frozen.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Can we talk about an „oligarchic” political control in these areas? Can we talk about selective nature of these processes depending on the political affiliation of those targeted? Are there any solutions?

■ **Phil Batson:** Whilst only some actors are targeted there will continue to be a problem of perception, and doubts will remain over whether the political elite are sincere in their statements on tackling corruption, cleaning up the justice sector, recovering the lost \$billion etc. The issue of credibility can only be eliminated through the consistent implementation of reforms and following through on all commitments.

■ **Lina Grâu:** In a few months in Moldova presidential elections will be held. What is the stake of this election?

■ **Phil Batson:** It depends on what Moldovans want from their President: a ceremonial one or a hands-on one with increased powers. If the latter, then the Constitution will need to be changed. Conceivably, a more hands-on President could play a big role in moving the country forwards. That person could articulate a clear national identity based on inclusion and shared history. Someone who has the interests of all Moldovans at heart, irrespective of what language they use or what ethnic group they come from. I think that would be a step in the right direction. But it really depends on what the Moldovan people want and whether the new President is given the room to manoeuvre.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What are the major challenges which Moldova must face now and in near future?

Modern Moldova is barely 25 years old. It's time as a young adult to put the follies of youth behind it and mature into a more efficient and responsible grown up. Three major challenges:

- First, taking business out of politics (and vice versa) – it's just not the right recipe for reducing corruption or for changing people's perceptions of politicians. Politics should be about wanting to do good for your country. Rightly or wrongly, that's not the perception that people have here;
- Second, articulating a clear and inclusive national identity that makes full use of different histories, different languages and ethnicities – this will help

forge a stronger nation, give people a sense of national pride and start to reverse the energy-draining effects of migration. And, if there's the political will, it will also make negotiating a settlement with the Transnistrian region easier. This can't be ignored for another 25 years;

- Third, become less dependent on external players. Of course no nation is truly self-sufficient. But generating more income by producing more at home, having a fairer and more efficient taxation system, not wasting public funds through mismanagement or theft, would mean that standards of living would improve and the country would become less aid dependent.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What would be your message for Moldovan politicians and citizens at the completion of your diplomatic mission?

This year we celebrated Her Majesty The Queen's 90th birthday. She is also now the longest-serving British monarch. Whether you are a Royalist or a Republican, the majority of people in Britain believe that she has carried out her duties with extraordinary dignity and dedication.

Almost 60 years ago she said it was incumbent upon her to hold on to "ageless ideals" and "fundamental principles" which require "a special kind of courage which makes us stand up for everything we know is right, everything that is true and honest". My message to Moldovan politicians and citizens is to do the same.

Transnistria – regulation or new tensions?



Being in Chisinau and Tiraspol on 25th and 26th of July 26, Frank Walter Steinmeier, the German Foreign Minister and the acting chairman of OSCE, has called on to continue the “small steps” to increase confidence, which would lead to the development of a legal status for the Transnistrian region. Steinmeier insisted on the implementation of the Berlin protocol on the Transnistrian settlement, namely to recognize diplomas issued by the Transnistrian universities and the car license plates issued in Tiraspol for the international traffic. Steinmeier also said that a special status for the Transnistrian region can be accepted only by respecting the territorial

integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova.

In parallel to Steinmeier’s visit, on July 26th, the first joint military applications of the Russian Troops Operative Group and force structures of the region took place in Transnistria. Within the applications, infantry and tanks crossed the river Nistru, where, according to legend, “there were terrorists who were neutralized with the help of a special forces assault, parachuted out of a plane”, writes the media in the breakaway region.

The Moldovan authorities have reacted to these applications only

on August 5th, characterizing them as “defiant and unacceptable”. “Such actions undermine flagrantly the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, principles accepted by the leadership of the Russian Federation openly and unequivocally,” reads a press release of the Moldovan Foreign Ministry, which demands in an imperative way “resumption of the dialogue, including in the “5+2” format on the withdrawal of the Russian troops and ammunition from the territory of the Republic of Moldova and transformation of the current peacekeeping operation into a multinational civil mission with an international mandate.”

Igor Munteanu: A federalization model would disintegrate the Republic of Moldova rather than strengthen in

The Executive Director of the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives “Viitorul”, Igor Munteanu, has explained in an interview where the increased interest in the Transnistrian conflict settlement comes from in an electoral year for both banks of the river, that the “red lines» are that the Moldovan authorities should not cross in order to ensure a settlement in the interests of the Republic of Moldova and what the role of the Moldovan society is in monitoring the negotiations and avoiding compromises that can deepen the Transnistrian separatism.

■ **Lina Grâu:** For several years we have been witnessing a “break of interest” in the Transnistrian conflict settlement. This year, despite that it’s an election year and it’s unlikely to lead to tangible results, we see a very high activation of the interests and discussions on the topic. What is actually happening?

■ **Igor Munteanu:** There are several reasons for this interest. This conflict has stalled for too long to not to get to a new intersection, oscillating between escalation, striking a new balance or a possible reintegration model. The regional context has changed a lot, and together with that certain factors of conflict transformation have appeared: the war in Ukraine and the Association Agreement with the EU. It is clear that the Transnistrian business sector is attracted by the European market but their integration willingness is blocked by the militarist and clientelistic regime of Russia that would like to freeze the status quo of this separatism either by intimidation or by fantastic promises that still attract the misinformed public.

Thus we can see that the Transnistrian army and the Russian military are



practicing the Nistru river crossing-operations while the Russian officials are putting pressure on Chisinau to adopt a roadmap that would prolong the agony of the Tiraspol regime. The German presidency of the OSCE wants to get at least the appearance of a successful mediation in the case of this conflict, reiterating on several occasions that this conflict is easier to resolve than others. Some Germans officials seem to think that this conflict is easier to digest than the others, encouraging us with various rhetorical calls - “continue to strengthen the confidence,” “there are possibilities to move in small steps”, “the direction is correct”.

■ **Lina Grâu:** “Correct direction” may be a term understood differently in Chisinau and the big capitals. A solution could suit Russia and Germany at this point, but to

what extent is it beneficial to the Republic of Moldova which is an independent and sovereign state?

■ **Igor Munteanu:** Exactly. Hence the great complications. On the one hand, no one should advise us not to respect our own laws. The Constitution clearly stipulates in Article 1 that “Moldova is a sovereign, independent, unitary and indivisible” together with article 2, paragraph 2 “usurpation of state power constitutes the gravest crime against the people.” On the other hand, they insists discreetly that Chisinau should revise its legal framework, including the Constitution, and abrogate the 2005 Law on the special status of the region from the eastern part of the country. The „5+2” format is used to force Chisinau to abandon the constitutional prerogatives of sovereignty. This is practiced by some

Russian officials in their classic direct, cocky, and cynical style, but also by others who are doing it more discreetly and indirectly, in exchange for vague and irrelevant promises.

Some foreign officials pretend not to understand the essence of the regulatory process, which would mean elimination of the sources of conflict and reintegration of the Transnistrian region within the sovereign and indivisible Moldova and not preservation and multiplication of separation and division factors such as, for example, the Russian security and armed forces.

From this perspective, the interests of the Moldovan state are opposed to the goal promoted by Russian officials and different from the advice of the European diplomats. Russia is not hiding its strategic stake to decouple the Republic of Moldova from the EU, abolish the Association Agreement, using the Tiraspol regime as a “ram” to obtain a political regime clientelistic to its own interests - be it confederation or a dual-type federation. In other words, it's a case of the tail wagging the dog, while these politico-genetic fantasies might influence the Gagauz autonomy - another area fuelled by the Russian policy addressing the “compatriots from abroad” – a notion in which Moscow includes all Russian speaking population from former Soviet Union. A federalism model could disintegrate Moldova rather than strengthen it. Perhaps some would like to see Moldova mangled to pieces, controlled by Russian troops and special services, but not we, the citizens of this country.

The small steps policy is necessary for the OSCE approach and it doesn't matter which way we move. We could say that the OSCE is willing to affirm that it is agnostic as to the ultimate goal of negotiations between the parties. Sometimes, OSCE manages to bypass the issue of human rights, political persecution, impediments in freedom of

movement, right to property, because trenchant positions could be a pretext for prohibiting its access on the territory controlled by the separatist regime. OSCE didn't also excel in defending the Moldovans who were dispossessed of land in Transnistria, balancing between compromise approaches and topics.

■ **Lina Grău:** You talked about the interests of Russia and OSCE, the latter being very much influenced by the Russian Federation according to some analysts. What is Germany's interest in this combination? After Mr Steinmeier's visit to Chisinau, there were analysts saying that the German Foreign Minister spoke, in a way, on his own account and that what he said does not necessarily represent the interests of the European Union in this situation...

■ **Igor Munteanu:** I think it is a bit exaggerated. The Foreign Minister Steinmeier speaks on behalf of the German state. Minister Steinmeier is a political actor. It is possible that in the political competition from this autumn, certain political ideas of Mr Steinmeier in relation with Russia have certain meaning. But in my opinion, planting electoral seeds in a protracted conflict is not a good recipe for votes' capitalization.

We should not underestimate the institutional factor of the OSCE's construction, in which certain fixed ideas and approaches change slowly and are run-through dozens of advisers and technical staff.

The missing actor in this landscape is Moldova, which has no national strategy for the recovery of the Transnistrian region. I think that when you do not allocate sufficient financial resources and set vague objectives, you convey the message that you do not care about what you get. Many presidents of the Republic of Moldova have accepted unfair compromises out of naivety or avarice, or political helplessness. The former presidents were not adequately prepared

for sophisticated “scheming” in the Transnistria complex file nor persuasive in relation to external factors.

A conflict of this kind requires intermestic policies- attractive for international players but played with domestic resources. If you ensure the support of key players in order to transform this conflict, you must have a domestic policy equipped with adequate resources, loyal and professional structures with sufficient attraction for the public and elites who can negotiate joint solutions even if their strategic interests are different.

Since 2014, Chisinau has had at its disposal an Association Agreement with the EU, which can create competitive advantages for the business and Moldovans in Transnistria. Let us not forget that the population will always vote with the head and stomach. We have to reach those over 300,000 Moldovans in Transnistria and to do our best that the free movement doesn't prevent the Moldovan citizens from visiting any village in the separatist area while the newspapers and books should be purchased freely and the ownership of Moldovan citizens should not be questioned by any Transnistrian court, and citizens should be defended against injustice and persecution of this regime. These three elements form an equation of power that Chisinau has not exploited so far and things should change. Chisinau should get rid of the victim complex and the complex of the lamb sacrificed by the most powerful in order to assert its own ideas and policies in relation to its national interests.

Equally important is not to admit to be drawn into ridiculous traps such as this Roadmap, signalled by some officials in Chisinau that would be of interest to the Republic of Moldova with the risk of overturning the important agreement that Chisinau signed with the EU on June 27, 2014 - the Association Agreement – and with the risk to be ‘impaled’ because that would suit private interests. Let us not forget that the Russian Deputy

Prime Minister Rogozin wants to make Moldova pay for the odious debt of the separatist regime for the unpaid natural gas consumption, which is currently about 6 billion USD and which the Kremlin would like to use as “tag” (price) for solving the Transnistrian conflict.

■ **Lina Grău:** I’ve heard signals in Chisinau lately from some factors in power or close to power that the 2005 law is not feasible and that it should be modified... In addition, the Speaker Andrian Candu was quoted in a press statement that a draft paper of the conflict resolution is being prepared. Is Chisinau prepared enough or does it have the necessary “backing” in order to cope with the Russian interests that you mentioned above? Does Chisinau have supporters on its side to negotiate a fair solution?

■ **Igor Munteanu:** First, the 2005 Law was not abrogated by anyone- it is in effect and it is of paramount importance as legislative act and all officials who launch such ideas should read it twice before touching this subject.

I have to mention that one of the biggest problems of Moldova is that its political elites do not have the necessary training. There is a profound deficit of strategic culture, most of the politicians reading little, having superficial knowledge about the problems they seek to address and capsize lamentably when confronted with complex issues. The sociologist D. Gusti refers to this phenomenon as to the “negative selection of elites”. For this reason, the tailors who make bread and the bakers who make carts produce lamentable results. Unfortunately, Moldova is fragile also because of disregarding certain traditions of loyalty in construction of the State, what by the American tradition would be called “state crafting”.

I personally believe that an effective policy regarding the Transnistrian conflict settlement will not fail only if guided by “red lines” as intangible elements

to the interests of the state and society in Moldova. What do these “red lines” mean for a frozen conflict? Without exaggeration, the red lines should mean binding directions of conduct for all state institutions involved in the regulatory process. When some politicians may promise phantasmal things, the red lines should prevent irreparable damage, or stimulate the search for solutions of compensatory anticipation of possible damages out of respect for the strategic interests of the country.

This would fit also your question on the results of the Minister Steinmeier’s visit. This Protocol of Intent, which was developed at the last “5+2” meeting in Berlin cannot cancel the existing laws in Moldova. In addition, you mentioned a very important thing - election fever. In reality, we are on the eve of elections both in Tiraspol and Chisinau. Before elections, the players are tempted to sell the uncaught fox to win votes.

In other words, it is not the competence of the prime minister to contradict the Art. 12 of the Constitution-“the state symbols” and Article 10 -“Unity of the Nation”, which prohibits any form of division of the Moldovan people’s unity, which is the common and indivisible homeland of all its citizens”, accepting Transnistrian distinct signs for cars that would be equal to recognition of the separatist regime. There are serious questions also in relation to the university degrees in Tiraspol. It is clearly written there: diploma of the Tiraspol State University and not of the state of the Republic of Moldova, but of an unrecognized state entity. Nobody will convince me that this thing is in Moldova’s favour.

If they accept a compromise on symbolic things, but with wide consequences for the entire space of manoeuvre throughout the regulatory process, the officials should assume full responsibility for the consequences. They want to collect offerings, dodging

responsibility; they are ready to maximize the compromises proposed by foreign chancelleries without paying for the broken pitchers who will surely fall on the ordinary citizens’ heads. Because maintaining and pampering the separatist regime in Transnistria is not in the interests of the ordinary citizens, but solely for the benefit of the Russian Federation. It is a blank check for the Russian troops to maintain their current form and the military base in Tiraspol in the coming years, and admitting the fact that we don’t have accountable state authorities in the current coalition government.

All these things- the Roadmap negotiated under the table, the persistent ideas of “small steps of confidence building”, but without reciprocity- speak clearly about the fact that some politicians find it increasingly difficult “to pull rabbits out of the hat” to entertain the public, without sufficient popular confidence and with a dubious reputation of serving the national interest.

■ **Lina Grău:** How do you see the prospect - until the end of the year, maybe next year – of the situation in Transnistria and the Transnistrian conflict settlement? Has the Moldovan civil society and the public a say in this issue? Is its voice heard? Does it count?

■ **Igor Munteanu:** The civil society matters a lot, especially in transition societies. Only the civil society is not a uniform, colourless, odourless mass, it is a synthesis of all relevant views of active groups in society. In Moldova, the civil society will count as long as it can effectively coordinate its moral capital and priorities without sliding in platitudes and propagandistic festivals exploited by cynical politicians.

The civil society has never actually slept on the Transnistrian issue; it generated ideas, collected data, served as defenders in the justice for those who have been arrested and intimidated in Transnistria,

took policy initiatives, including the development and promotion of the 3D Strategy in 2004. It also consulted the adoption of the law on the status of eastern districts in 2005 and provided consultations in the development of a draft on the special status for the Transnistrian region in 2012, which should complement and not substitute the existing “red lines”. There are influential organizations that have been associated with these initiatives, sparing no efforts and resources.

Also today, the civil society can be a valuable and credible partner, especially in the context of the fundamental change of the regional security, but only in circumstances where there is trust, openness and clear rules of cooperation. Why do I say that the regional security regime has changed? Primarily because we have a war in the immediate vicinity, in eastern Ukraine. The Russian Federation has been fighting already for the second year in the neighbouring country Ukraine by means of a hybrid war, whose methods and instruments often influence our country.

This hybrid war did not start in 2014, it began long before – when the Russian Federation obtained the controlling package of gas networks, when it took over the controlling package of Moldova-Gaz (1994), and when the Russian Federation became the official main sponsor of the separatist administration in Tiraspol. Defying the final declaration of the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit, the Russian Federation has disowned its own obligations to withdraw unconditionally and immediately the troops from the Republic of Moldova under the pretext that a regime sponsored financially by it doesn't allow it to do it – also a kind of hybrid war fought by means of manipulation and propaganda.

Acceptance of a confederative regime with Transnistria would mean recognition of a player with veto right imposed outside

the constitutional field, a special kind of “veto player” that would split the decision-making process. It would mean that any political agreement or treaty, any bilateral or multilateral cooperation policy with EU countries or the USA would have to pass the opportunity test in Comrat and Tiraspol, leading to an increased mediation right of another state such as the Russian Federation, for example. This is a plausible scenario, taking into consideration the long period of brainwashing of the region together with the stunning propagandist machine that Russia uses globally. I do not think anyone needs such regulatory recipes in Chisinau.

All these examples of “hybrid war” are, in fact, signs of government failures. The security risks posed by the maintenance of the military personnel at less than 45 kilometres from Chisinau are real, serious, and hard to ignore. Yet the conflict settlement is more plausible today than a decade ago.

■ **Lina Grău:** Does Chisinau have supporters in this game of forces? Can the United States, European Union, Ukraine support Moldova in this issue?

■ **Igor Munteanu:** You mentioned the United States. In my capacity as Ambassador to the USA (2010-2015), I managed to get acceptance of a strategic dialogue format between the USA and the Republic of Moldova, launched in March 2014 - a format that we really wanted and that opens the access to commitment tools particularly useful to the states concerned. The USA is a country that respects peoples who value their freedom and are able to fight for it.

At present, Moldova suffers from a high degree of corruption, its structures of power are controlled by “illegal powers,” which generates and maintains weak and ineffective institutions. It is obvious that the strategic dialogue with the most influential nation of the modern world cannot function under these conditions.

A dialogue is possible only when credible political alternatives are responsible for the destiny of this state. Credibility and democratic legitimacy go hand in hand with economic efficiency.

The same refers to Romania. Romania can play as long as it has the satisfaction of a well done job, when you give it the opportunity to be influential or have an important voice in the sectors that it can invest or where the Romanian business feels comfortable. Only if Romania's voice is heard with attention and appreciation, can Romania be influential, in other cases not.

The European Union is vitally important for the prosperity of our country. The suspension of financing in July 2015 was an extremely harsh penalty because the EU is based more on transformative methods, soft power and rarely resorts to sanctions imposed on partner states. Such decisions were applied only to Belarus, and now we can see them applied also in the case of the Republic of Moldova which promised to be a “success story”. But this happened not because the European Union has changed its position, but because we considered that we can take advantage of the benefits- “eating the carrot”, without being good at “pulling the plug”. We did not do the reforms and let all kinds of ill-intentioned actors to penetrate the security and political system of the Republic of Moldova. We were irresponsible with public money and we approached in a populist manner the benefits of the free trade area with the EU.

We must have the courage to return to a normal space with more credible and visionary political actors and then the USA and EU will help us fix what we have done wrong in the process. So, to cut it short, we should be accountable in order to benefit from the trust and strategic investments for the idea of Europeanisation of the Moldovan society.

Editorial

Ernest Vardanean

Elections in Transnistria – are they going to change the situation?

There are still four months until the so-called elections of the leader of the unrecognized Transnistrian region. In December, the residents of the left bank will cast their votes for the sixth time for their preferred candidate for the position of “president”. But for the first time in 26 years of the de facto independence of Transnistria these elections will be the most unpredictable and, undoubtedly, the dirtiest.

If we look back at the election campaigns since 1991, we

see that, virtually, every time the main topic was the foreign policy issues and/ or the relations with the Republic of Moldova. Thus, during the 1991 election campaign, Transnistria had existed only for one and a half year and against the background of the USSR falling apart, there was no more important problem than the physical survival of the Transnistrian administration and the deepening of its separation from the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova. That is why Igor Smirnov’s victory was not questioned and was basically a technical issue.

In 1996, the elections took place in a more peaceful spirit and focused on the domestic policy. The main topic of the election campaign was strengthening of the de facto statehood (especially in light of the adoption of the Transnistrian Constitution), improving trade and economic relations with Russia and Ukraine, normalization of the dialogue with Moldova in the process of building a “common state” (an idea which materialized through the Memorandum signed in Moscow in 1997).

In 2001, the situation worsened very suddenly: the euphoria after coming to power of the Communist Party and the series of private meetings between Vladimir Voronin and Igor Smirnov was replaced by escalation of the situation in August-September. Withdrawal by the Moldovan authorities of the customs stamps for the Transnistrian businesses on August



31, 2001 was interpreted by Tiraspol as “customs blockade” and the negotiations stopped for months ahead. The elections from December 9, 2001 took place under the “save the country” slogan and Smirnov’s main competitor - Tom Zenovie, the mayor of Bender- had been declared “enemy of the republic” and “Moldova’s agent”, despite the fact that the latter was no less separatist than Smirnov. The Russian media was then acting against the Tiraspol administration, a fact which

was determined by the good relations of Voronin with Vladimir Putin, the latter having promised to “sort out the things with the so-called Sheriff Republic”. The victory of the then Transnistrian leader was ensured through massive falsifications – the author of these lines personally witnessed how a large number of ballots marked with Smirnov’s name was thrown in the ballot box. According to some publications of the time, Smirnov’s result was “increased” by at least 30 percent, and as a result, he won the elections with the impressive figure of over 80 percent.

The 2006 elections took place against the background of the “blockade” - the customs regime introduced by Ukraine and Moldova in March 2006. In September 2006, a “referendum” was organized in Transnistria in which 97 percent of the Transnistrian residents who participated in the voting opted for the “independence and subsequent free entry into the Russian Federation”, refusing the possibility of building a “common state” with the Republic of Moldova. That is why the campaign was organized again under patriotic slogans, most of the propaganda materials having been developed with the expertise and direct financial contribution of the Russian Federation. By the way, the questions for the “referendum” were drafted by the representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry. It is obvious that in the 2006 campaign there was no real alternative to Igor Smirnov, especially that he was enjoying then the open support of

Moscow. His competitors were actually spoilers, their role being to create the illusion of an alternative. It's about the caricaturist character Piotr Tomailî, a deputy from Bender, representative of the Sheriff, and the false opposition journalist Andrei Safonov, who in private talks showed his admiration for Igor Smirnov and hatred for Shevchuk. It was obvious that Tomailî and Safonov had no chance against Smirnov.

Cardinal changes took place in the elections from 2011. First, Moscow disowned Igor Smirnov publicly and triggered media attacks against him, bringing to the surface corruption cases and embezzlement of "gas fund money" by members of his family. They relied on the then president of the Supreme Soviet, Anatoly Kaminsky, who had neither charisma, nor popularity. Secondly, in that election, for the first time a real alternative appeared. Despite the administrative resources at hand for Smirnov but in the absence of any external support, in the runoff election (by the way, it was for the first time that a second round of elections took place), the victory was obtained by Shevchuk. Having only a small team, but taking advantage of the fatigue that people felt in relation to Smirnov, the ambitious young politician traveled throughout Transnistria, applying the "door to door" electoral technique.

Shevchuk's coming to power did not make the Transnistrians happy as they have not seen any changes for the better. First, his electoral team failed to turn into a managers' team – the staff deficit and his strange approach in appointing people for important offices resulted in systemic errors but also in social-economic failures. Second, Shevchuk's rhetoric ("Smirnov is to blame") became boring to people as they started demanding programmes for tackling the budget crisis faced by Transnistria, paying no attention to the monotonous criticism.

Consequently, the presidential team started making rough mistakes, which made their most loyal supporters and most disciplined voters - pensioners and employees of the public sector- abandon it. Cutting wages and pensions hit painfully the population that began to look for alternatives. The alternative turned out to be the Sheriff Company that is controlling the majority in the Supreme Soviet through Obnovlenie Party, after the general elections from November 2015. The extremely tough competition between Obnovlenie (Sheriff) and Yevgeny Shevchuk added to the social and financial problems. At one point they played as one team, but in 2009, Shevchuk tried to retaliate after coming to power by putting pressure on Sheriff.

At present, the largest Transnistrian holding and the Supreme Soviet started the counterattack, using the people's dissatisfaction. Shevchuk and his executive are accused of having destroyed the economy and withdrawn the money in offshores and even that they had been "colluding with the enemies of the republic in order to liquidate it". Particularly vocal in these accusations is Andrei Safonov, who became an MP and very close to Obnovlenie.

Shevchuk's popularity rating is consistently decreasing and the people say he cannot repeat his success from 2011, mainly because his voters will not forgive him for having cut the budget allocations. It is highly probable that the candidate of the Obnovlenie party will win the December elections - most likely the candidate will be the current chairman of the Supreme Soviet, the former Interior Minister, Vadim Krasnoselskii. This issue though does not seem to be that much of a concern to Moldova or Russia, because all candidates are equally oriented towards Moscow and significant changes in the negotiation process are not likely.

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