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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

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

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The last period was marked by a series of important events for the Republic of Moldova.



The visa liberalization regime granted by the EU to the Republic of Moldova in 2014 is working well, with a very low refusal rate, over 850 000 Moldovan citizens having already travelled without a visa in the Schengen area, according to the European Commission's report on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The report also stresses that the EU supports the negotiations for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in order to identify peaceful and sustainable solutions. The creation of free trade areas with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine opens up new trade and investment opportunities and a more stable operating environment for EU and regional companies. The EU is the number one trade partner for all three DCFTA partners. The EU share in the total trade in 2016 increased to 55% for the Republic of Moldova, 41% for Ukraine and 30% for Georgia.



The Russian company "Inter RAO", owned by the Cuciurgan Electric Power Plant in the Transnistrian separatist region, regained 70% of the current supplies to the Republic of Moldova. Chisinau changed the provisions of the March 31 agreement, according to which the Ukrainian company DTEK Holding was to be the only energy supplier. The price at which Energomold will buy energy from Cuciurgan is 45 USD per megawatt, compared to 50 USD as originally offered by the Ukrainian supplier. The change of contract took place without any public tender and the European Energy Community criticized the lack of transparency of the transaction. As a first reaction, the leader of the Transnistrian region, Vadim Krasnoselski, thanked the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin for his alleged role in the resumption of the energy supplies on the Moldovan market.



The Moldova-Romania Inter-Governmental Commission for European Integration met in Chisinau after a two-year break. According to IPN, the agreements reached on this occasion include support for police reform by sharing experience and good practices for the development of the Joint Law Enforcement Training Center, as well as cooperation in the field of justice.



The Parliament has re-voted the draft law on ratification of the Protocol for amending the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Government of Romania on cooperation in the military field. The document was previously rejected by President Igor Dodon on the grounds that it violates Moldova's status of neutrality. Roman Botan, chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, said that this protocol provides an opportunity to strengthen the bilateral Moldovan-Romanian relations in the field of defense and invoked the decision of the Constitutional Court, which stated that "the neutrality status does not impose additional conditions that can limit the foreign policy of the neutral state." After the re-voting of the document by Parliament, President Igor Dodon is forced to promulgate it.

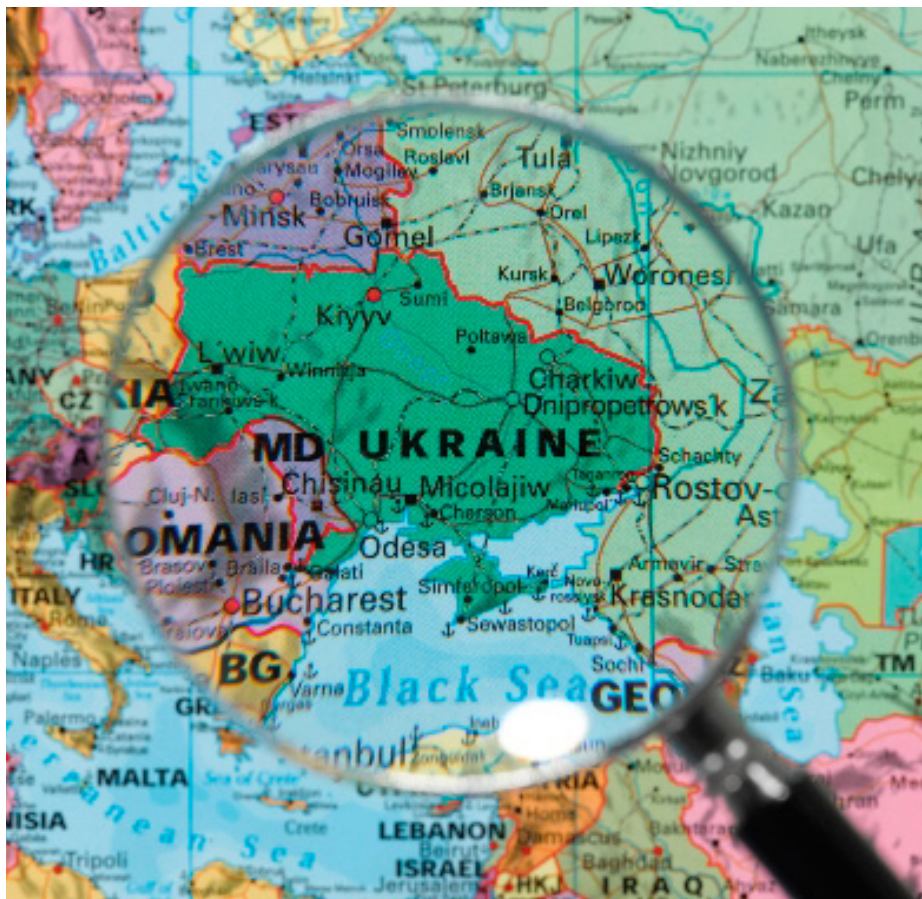


The Democratic Party has registered in the Parliament a draft law designed to combat the Russian TV propaganda. According to the Democratic Party leader Vlad Plahotniuc, the draft law is not going to ban the Russian TV programmes and broadcasts, especially the entertainment shows, but the democrats admit that the Russian analytical and informational programmes will undergo changes and the focus will be on news about the EU, USA, Canada and NATO. The draft law provides for financial sanctions and even for withdrawal of the broadcasting license for those who will not comply with the law. The director of the Independent Press Association, Petru Macovei, thinks the initiative is a necessary one, but says in an interview to Radio Free Europe that he has no confidence in the sincerity of the Democratic Party and its leader "who has been rebroadcasting for over ten years the most toxic propagandistic channel of the Russian Federation - "Perviy Kanal".



The most recent poll, conducted by the Public Opinion Fund at the command of Polieexpert, shows that 57% of respondents believe that Moldova should be close to Russia, while 43% opt for the West and Europe. The survey data place the Russian Federation on top of the countries towards which Moldovans have positive attitudes. Russia is followed by the EU, Romania, Ukraine and USA. The idea of Moldova joining NATO is supported by 21% of the respondents and 23% opted for unification of Moldova with Romania.

To what extent can the Republic of Moldova guarantee its security?



Natalia Albu: The external threats are fueled by the vulnerability within the state - by poor governance

Associate Professor *Natalia Albu, PhD, Director of the Strategic Research Center at the Institute for Legal and Political Research of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Moldova, notes that the existence of a conflict on the territory of the Republic of Moldova that threatens its territorial integrity is the most imminent threat, but there exist also other vulnerable areas fuelled especially by the weaknesses generated by poor governance, a notion that concerns political security.*

■ **Lina Grău:** To what extent can we say that the security environment in the region of the Republic of Moldova is now different from the one from a few years ago? Did things change after the events in Ukraine?

■ **Natalia Albu:** After the escalation of the situation in Ukraine, the security environment at the level of the Republic of Moldova is different because it has become clear about the attitude of important actors in the region such as the Russian Federation towards the foreign policy orientation of the CIS member states, the former Soviet Union republics.

Secondly, also the attitude of the international security structures towards the situation in the region is clear. Although some measures have been taken, however, the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the EU



member states are a priority for these structures.

■ **Lina Grău:** What are in your opinion the main security challenges facing our country?

■ **Natalia Albu:** If is to analyse from an academic perspective, it is obvious that the existence of a territorial conflict threatening the territorial integrity is the most

imminent threat to the security of a state, including the Republic of Moldova with its situation on the left bank of the Nistru.

If is to remember the top 15 challenges that were raised in 2015 in the Republic of Moldova and which we can still find on the website of the Academy of Science of the Republic of Moldova, some of them have not changed. So the situation of the Transnistrian conflict remained unchanged as well as the danger of external aggression on the part of a regional actor, as was the case with Ukraine. But these threats are very strongly fuelled by the vulnerability and risks inside the state - the poor governance which is rather a notion of political security.

If we analyse the reports of organizations such as Freedom House or other sources that analyse the governance indicator and also the Transnistrian region indicator, we can speak about Moldova being in the category of non-free states. If we look from the perspective of human rights and freedom of expression, the governance indicator is also very low.

That is why I would say that these three factors together - the regional situation, the quality of governance and the incapacity of the state given its insufficient human resources as well as the energy dependence - deepen the internal risks and threats, especially secessionism.

■ **Lina Grău:** Regarding the good or poor governance that you've mentioned above, could you please

elaborate how poor governance or democratic deficiencies can affect the security of a state. How can the deficiencies in the fight against corruption, respect for human rights and freedom of the media threaten the state security?

■ **Natalia Albu:** Looking from the academic perspective, sometimes there is confusion between national security and state security. National security refers also to the people, not just the security of government or political security, whereas state security refers in particular to the security of state institutions that ensure the governance. This confusion exists because they don't differentiate between the national security which is about people and its institutions and the state security. What happens is that certain risks and threats are prioritized.

For instance, propaganda and manipulation distract the attention from other issues such as poverty, corruption and others, which occurs very often in the Republic of Moldova. That is why, in this situation, the population begins to lose confidence in such values as democracy, European integration—they associate them with the government.

Therefore propaganda, which is very strong in the context of a hybrid war, is perceived as a threat. The case of Ukraine is eloquent in this sense, when according to propaganda, the conflict was generated by the fact that Ukraine wanted to join the EU. So there are manipulations that are used in the interests of political elites.

■ **Lina Grâu:** The Moldovan authorities have started the security reform. From your point of view, what are the achievements and deficiencies of this reform? Do you think there is enough political will for these reforms?

■ **Natalia Albu:** The Security Sector Reform is a concept that was launched in 2001-2003. But I would say that at the concept level, the security reform is neglected at the moment, with the authorities focusing more on adopting sectoral strategies, such as the national defence strategy, for instance. We do have a military doctrine dated with 1995, but it is rather outdated. Over the years there have been attempts to update it, but those were sporadic initiatives which didn't lead to concrete results. So they don't take into account the national interests and real threats.

Talking about the security and defense sector reform, the latter is restricted to the restructuring of the Ministry of Interior, the Border Police, and the integrated state border management. When it comes to the force structures, it's enough to say that we don't have a Defense Minister until present.

In my opinion, the situation of the security sector reform at the moment is uncertain and some experts think that the security reform concept is outdated.

■ **Lina Grâu:** With regard to the security challenges of Moldova, on the one hand, they are a lot, on the other hand, the Republic of Moldova

declares that it is a neutral state. To what extent can the relationship with NATO or with the Eastern partners, help Moldova overcome its security challenges?

■ **Natalia Albu:** In April, I attended a four-week course on regional security at the Marshall Center. I am generally optimistic, but those weeks have been enough to become less so. And when you come back to the country, you realize something needs to be done.

What did I mean? There were many representatives of different structures and other states that spoke about security in the region – Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia and especially the Republic of Moldova. And they have made it clear that for the time being, the relations with major global partners are a priority for the Western structures. Under these circumstances, Moldova will be given some help, but in case of threats to member countries, they will have priority.

In response to my question about the European Union's vision regarding the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict and the most plausible scenario, the following day I received a response by e-mail about the level of corruption in our country. And the answer was that the problem is not the degree of engagement and involvement of the European Union, but the situation of the Republic of Moldova.

My conclusion is that we have very good opportunities and instruments to promote Moldova

as an independent state while maintaining the neutral status - in order not to fuel the speculations of those who want to use NATO as a scarecrow. However, the authorities need to work with the people and the society in order to inform them about the benefits of cooperation with NATO and the EU.

I see, however, support and clarity in our relations with NATO and the EU, and only our level and quality will determine the relationship with them. Nobody is imposing anything to us, but we should have a clear positioning.

In addition, that same course made me understand that we still have to determine ourselves in which direction we go. Because if we are talking about joining the Eurasian project certain standards apply and totally different standards apply if we want to join the EU and the Euro-Atlantic project. And it's not that we cannot collaborate with both structures, but the standards are different - economic, values - and we have to adjust either to some standards or the other.

■ **Lina Grău:** So, what you are saying is that it's high time for Republic of Moldova to choose a direction?

■ **Natalia Albu:** We should have done it long time ago. I just suppose we've been given a period of respite because we had a chance to be a successful story of the EaP. Many Europeans have told me that we have all the qualities for that as it was easier to manage corruption in the Republic of Moldova than in

other states. Another advantage was that we are a small country and there are also well-trained people.

■ **Lina Grău:** Then how do you explain that this "success story" has become a headache in the Eastern Partnership?

■ **Natalia Albu:** I come from academia and I do not like to do politics, but we are getting back to the quality of government. Any strategy of collaborating with society should be aimed at the civil society, including people from the regions who have relatives abroad. They are the target groups with which they should work. They are those who need to be convinced that we need a certain orientation and that it is a good one.

Regarding the quality of government, I would say that from the academic point of view, it is necessary to prioritize correctly the needs of the state in accordance with the national interest. But, frankly speaking, I did not see a strategic document that formulates clearly the national interest of the Republic of Moldova.

■ **Lina Grău:** From your point of view, is the opening of a NATO office in Chisinau a threat to the security of the Republic of Moldova as this is what it's said at the highest level and namely at the level of the President of the Republic of Moldova?

■ **Natalia Albu:** I do not think it's a threat. I personally think it's a good thing that we opened this office. Often we, the people from

the academic environment, want to have access to certain projects, but we do not know who our partners might be. We have access to certain projects, but you have to have partners with capacities, otherwise you cannot be successful and get funding. The NATO Office provides the necessary information that facilitates access to these projects.

Secondly, the status of this office is similar to that of Georgia. The office is to the advantage of the Republic of Moldova because NATO counts on the Partnership for Peace and Security for Science Programmes not only for multilateral cooperation, but also for bilateral cooperation within which you can find NATO partners. The presence of the office doesn't oblige a country to become NATO member.

That's why I do not see it as a threat, juts on the contrary, I think it is beneficial from the perspective of research and collaboration. For instance, the environment programme through which Moldova could get rid of the pesticides was very beneficial for the country. Unfortunately, the population does not really know these aspects.

■ **Lina Grău:** As regards the international military exercises in which Moldovan soldiers have participated over the years, do you think the Moldovan soldiers benefited from those exercises? Is it necessary for the Republic of Moldova's army to participate in military exercises with NATO and EU countries? We know that this

participation has been forbidden lately by the President Igor Dodon.

■ **Natalia Albu:** Of course they need to participate in these multinational exercises, because the National Army's budget does not allow for trainings of the military while those exercises increase the level of professionalism of the armed forces. These multinational exercises are needed in the era of globalization where the risks and threats are common - we are talking about asymmetric threats, we are talking about fighting terrorism, and we are not talking about an open battlefield where it is clear who the opponent is. So, we need to be interoperable with other security structures and provide mutual support if need be. We are also talking about the need for multinational exercises in Ukraine that we haven't had so far despite the fact that they are our neighbours and that we face the same security issues.

Respectively, I believe that in the context of professionalization of the armed forces, this exercise is very good. I cannot give you very accurate figures at this moment, but I know that, for example, a trained military should make 10 shots a day, while in Moldova, he does just one. The national army cannot meet all the needs.

The example of Bangladesh is well known - they are participating in UN peacekeeping missions very actively and by doing so they professionalize their army. And if at first they had to invest more in the soldiers, now they, being credible partners, spend

only on the equipment they provide, diesel and transport. It would have been more expensive to provide for the same level of professionalism in the country than in missions.

■ **Lina Grâu:** How could you characterize the security situation of the Republic of Moldova? Is the Republic of Moldova capable of ensuring its security?

■ **Natalia Albu:** The state of security of a state, if we are to analyze it according to the formula, is to add the vulnerability, the risk and the threat and divide them by capacity. This is the mathematical formula of a state's security state. If we added all the risks, threats and vulnerabilities of the Republic of Moldova and divided them by capacity, we would get a result which is below the security average level of a state. This calculation is usually applied in emergency situations, but the situation of the Republic of Moldova also applies. And I would assess the level of security of our country below the average.

There exist ordinary risks, exceptional risks and imminent risks. The above formula indicates that at the moment, the state can only cope with ordinary risks pertaining to the entire population, - be it refugees, minorities or vulnerable people. So, the state ensures the order with the help of the internal forces and the police. When the level of threat towards a state increases, we are talking about exceptional risks – it is about the need for protection of certain social segments of the

population, including refugees. We do not have refugees, but we have internally displaced people as a result of the Transnistrian conflict, and we don't have any legislation that would regulate this situation. And according to the given structure, we can say that our state is below the average. This means that the state is able to cope only with minimum ordinary risks for the population and state institutions.

The army intervenes when the third-level risk emerges-imminent risks-when the state territorial integrity and vitality are threatened.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What you are saying is that at the level of simpler risks, the Republic of Moldova is able to provide security, but in case of more serious challenges there are doubts as to the state capacity to cope with them?

■ **Natalia Albu:** Yes, there are certain doubts. But again, this is about partnerships. When more serious risks arise, no state can independently secure its own security and for this reason, the states adhere to a certain security structure. In this context, the Republic of Moldova needs to review its partners and allies as well as to provide for the necessary regulations in order to counteract the risks.

But given the fact that the Republic of Moldova is neutral and is not part of any political-military alliances, the assistance package of the North Atlantic Alliance refers only to logistics, consultations and recommendations.

Ion Tăbârță: Moldovan political actors exploit security threats in order to obtain electoral and economic dividends



Ion Tăbârță, expert with IDIS Viitorul, says the Republic of Moldova has a lot of challenges when it comes to state security and unfortunately, it doesn't have a vision of how they can be overcome. In addition, the political actors are trying to exploit to the fullest extent all the existing security threats of the Republic of Moldova in order to obtain as many electoral or economic dividends as possible.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Experts say the security environment in Moldova and in the

region has changed in recent years. In which way? How can this change be defined?

■ **Ion Tăbârță:** It has changed since the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. After the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the opening of a new separatist land in eastern Ukraine by the Russian Federation, Kiev has quite differently started to look at the security architecture in South-Eastern Europe and has revised considerably its relationship with the Republic of Moldova on the Transnistrian issue.

If, until 2014, Kiev tolerated certain Tiraspol policies and even certain segments of the Ukrainian elites encouraged them in order to obtain economic benefits, after 2014 there appeared a state policy in Kiev aimed at stifling the potential dangers that may come from Tiraspol towards Kiev.

It should be mentioned that the Transnistrian separatism, with the onset of the Ukrainian crisis, gained geo-strategic importance in the policy promoted by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, not only against the Republic of Moldova. Moscow has long used the Transnistrian conflict to stop or temper certain European orientation policies of the Republic of Moldova. At one point, however, Tiraspol was no longer an effective leverage against the European orientation of the Republic of Moldova. The problems arose from the inside because of the political situation in the Republic of Moldova, but the Transnistrian conflict was no longer such an obstacle. And the Russian Federation has tried to use this separatist conflict more and more against Ukraine.

But things have changed politically in the Republic of Moldova. We are witnessing a certain stage policy of a pro-Russian party in Chisinau- the Party of Socialists and the fact that the main exponent of this party, Igor Dodon, became president of the country, who is trying to remodel certain strategies of Moscow in Chisinau.

The Transnistrian region has begun to be taken into account in the so-called political scenario of the geopolitical reorientation of the Republic of Moldova. That is, to have a certain connection of the political institutions of the Republic of Moldova with the unrecognized institutions of the Transnistrian region and, somehow,

to reintroduce what we had in 1940, when the right bank of the Nistru River was connected to the left bank of the river, and the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was transformed into the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. A similar scenario, of course, preserving the proportions and the present situation of the moment, is now politically being pursued by the Russian Federation in the Republic of Moldova.

■ **Lina Grău:** You mentioned the Transnistrian issue as one of the biggest security challenges of the Republic of Moldova. What are the other challenges that influence the state of security of the country?

■ **Ion Tăbârță:** We now have several challenges, especially political ones.

What has happened in the Moldovan politics and how functional the state institutions of the Republic of Moldova are is affecting very much the state security. Because one of these types of threats, if amplified, could create many institutional disturbances. We know very well what happened with the famous "laundromat" or "Russian laundry", when over 20 billion USD, we no longer know exactly how much, money from Russian federal sources was "laundered" through the Moldovan judicial system. Not to mention the devaluation of the banking system of the Republic of Moldova because of the famous "theft of the century".

All of these are, of course, serious threats to the security of Republic of Moldova, because what has happened shows that our state is a weak one, that any kind of serious threat can undermine the existence of the Republic of Moldova.

Another less-known threat would be a possible military threat. At one point, of course, such a scenario seems somehow unreal, but let us remember that neither the Georgians in 2008 nor the Ukrainians in 2014 expected a possible military aggression against them. Of course, this scenario is not the most plausible at the moment, but at the same time it must not be ruled out at all.

■ **Lina Grău:** The anti-democratic abuses that some voices say are happening more and more often in the Republic of Moldova, do they threaten the security of the country?

■ **Ion Tăbârță:** Anti-democratic abuses in the Republic of Moldova are a real problem. And here we can talk about a certain democratic evolution and involution in the Republic of Moldova.

In the 1990s, the Republic of Moldova was a state where everyone thought that, although it slowly democratized, it was still democratizing. Then came Voronin's regime with its evolutions and involutions. Especially, of course, during the 2007-2009 period many talked and not without reason that there were already certain authoritarian tendencies in the Republic of Moldova and that the country was heading towards an authoritarian state.

After that, we had again a period of evolution of pro-European governments or the so-called AIE cycle. In the period of 2009-2013, until the crisis in the *Padurea Domneasca*, we all talked about an evolution in the Republic of Moldova. And the crisis or the unfortunate incident in the *Padurea Domneasca* from January 2013 has brought to light all the rottenness of the state institutions of the Republic of Moldova, and since

then we have been talking about a certain involution and about the so-called 'captured state'.

And the year 2015, in fact, meant the end of the AIE cycle and the beginning of another process - at least at the moment, it can be seen that the current Moldovan political system is built on the foundation of the Democratic Party. Even here, although the government of the Republic of Moldova is declared a European and at least declaratively it is oriented towards European integration, in practice, we see that there are many actions that are not very pro-European.

On the one hand, the party says it supports all the pro-European partners, but on the other hand, it makes certain tacit agreements with a pro-Russian party from the Republic of Moldova, synchronizing its movements with it. The bipolarization of the Moldovan society is going on. Even the change of the electoral system will lead to the strengthening of strong parties. And at the moment, the most powerful parties are the Democratic Party and the Party of Socialists. And the share of small parties, including pro-European parties, will decrease.

I mean, there is a risk that the Republic of Moldova will be heading on a path of authoritarianism, at least for a certain period of time. And this can be used in a direct way by the Russian Federation. The ruling party, in order to get some dividends to be able to maintain its leadership, may give in to a certain extent to the Socialist Party. For example, if we look at the mixed voting system and at the provisions regarding the Transnistrian region, the latter can create very dangerous preconditions when the exponents of the Tiraspol regime can enter the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova,



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bypassing a certain filter and control from Chisinau.

Indeed, Chisinau has always said that the people in the Transnistrian region should participate in the parliamentary elections of the Republic of Moldova, but the region has to open politically and informationally to the Moldovan political actors. Both Tiraspol and Moscow were always against that. However, with this draft law, conditions are created for those in the Transnistrian region to enter the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, without the authorities there to open politically and informationally to the political actors in Chisinau.

■ **Lina Grâu:** This situation of division and bipolarity at the level of the leadership of the Republic of Moldova is also reflected in the situation created around the opening of the NATO office in the Republic of Moldova. From your point of view, is this office a challenge for the security and neutrality of the Republic of Moldova?

■ **Ion Tăbârță:** No, this office is no challenge. It is ridiculous to say that a NATO office opened in the Republic of Moldova with a civilian mission is posing a bigger threat to the security of the Republic of Moldova than the Russian troops that have been stationed in the Transnistrian region since the existence of the Republic of Moldova as a state.

First of all, Moscow had an unreasonable reaction to this. Moscow uses actors of political influence in Chisinau in order to prevent this office from opening. And it goes informally on the cliché of the cold war when NATO was a rival and even an aggressive organization from the perspective of Soviet propaganda. And

what Russia is doing here from the informative point of view, it is trying to maintain these clichés and exploit them to the fullest.

We know it very well what the rhetoric of the Russian propaganda was in 2005-2006, when the NATO Documentation and Information Center was opened in Moldova. And nothing serious happened, the Documentation and Information Center being more as a library.

Now the Republic of Moldova needs a co-operation with NATO, it even needs closer cooperation on a number of segments, but our status of neutrality does not allow us to deepen our military co-operation.

The NATO issue has always been neglected in Moldova. Even influential political parties that were in the government, with some exceptions, did not touch the NATO issue. They all talked about European integration, but less about NATO. The PPCD spoke at times, the Liberal Party was talking about it, and otherwise, the NATO issue was some sort of a taboo subject.

Some discussions though in the Moldovan society about the role of NATO and how it could contribute to the security of the Republic of Moldova do take place. They would allow us to inform better the public about what NATO is and about the fact that the current NATO and the cooperation of the Republic of Moldova with NATO is not what it used to be during the cold war.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Also in this context, how do you see the interdiction for the Moldovan soldiers to participate in the military exercises with NATO and

European Union states? Do Moldovan soldiers need such exercises?

■ **Ion Tăbârță:** Of course they need them. From the point of view of professionalism and increased performance, we do need them. And our soldiers participated in several police operations, civilian operations, peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia and in a number of African states, where they were appreciated, and of course, they have increased their degree and level of competitiveness.

This does not mean that we are already preparing to enter war with someone tomorrow. But in case of a possible threat, we must have well-trained soldiers able to cope with the situation.

■ **Lina Grâu:** So, in general terms, what about the security situation in Moldova?

■ **Ion Tăbârță:** It is very bad. And I would not be afraid to say that because we do not see clear policies to improve the situation. Unfortunately, we don't have a state policy regarding all these security aspects or any kind of agreement that would lead to national cohesion.

Just the opposite, the political actors are trying to exploit to the full all these threats to the security of the Republic of Moldova, regardless of the types of threats, in order to obtain as many electoral dividends or, in certain situations, even economic dividends. Unfortunately, we do not have any rhetoric and mechanisms at the political level that would function as a whole and which would increase the capacity of state security of the Republic of Moldova.



Lasha Tughushi: **Not just the army ensures the state security, but also democracy and the fight against corruption**

The Georgian expert Lasha Tughushi, director of the Tbilisi Liberal Academy Foundation in Georgia, said in Chisinau that democracy, the rule of law and anti-corruption processes are fundamental pillars of the state security, in addition to the army and law enforcement forces. People in the Republic of Moldova deserve to live in a state free from corruption, which has perspectives and future, but the fight against corruption has to become a desideratum of the whole society, says the expert who recently participated in a security conference organized in Chisinau by the Foreign Policy Association and the Foreign Policy Council from Kiev in cooperation with the FES Regional Office "Dialogue Eastern Europe".

■ **Lina Grâu:** In your perception, how have the main security challenges in the region of our countries changed in recent years?

■ **Lasha Tughushi:** I do not think they have changed in principle, because the occupation troops station as before in two regions of

Georgia, posing a very serious threat to the whole country. Obviously, the political context has changed a bit, because the borders have been opened, it is possible to sell certain products, there are tourists, the circulation regime has improved, regular transport routes have been opened between the regions of the country. But unfortunately, the main issue hasn't been resolved and we can't talk about the conflict settlement.

But also our desire to become members of the EU and NATO has remained unchanged. As you know, we have signed the Association Agreement with the EU, we have already a visa-free regime with the EU, and we have very close relations with the United States, which helps us a lot. Georgia has very close relations with NATO.

Another dimension of security is, of course, democracy, the rule of law, and anticorruption processes. Not just the army contributes to the security - the army is important, just like other security structures, but the most important is the perception of the ordinary citizens and the way they feel. We are not a rich country, but we have managed to make serious moves despite the fact that the Georgians are always dissatisfied with their governments, this dissatisfaction being sometimes very big. But if we talk objectively, Georgia is changing gradually in the right direction. Our goal is to become a European country.

We have managed to make a big step

in the direction of anti-corruption. Even the road patrol is not taking bribes now. The prosecutors don't take bribes, the tax collectors don't take bribes, and the judges don't take bribes. When you get any certificate no one takes bribes and also you can enter the university without any bribe. This is what Georgia has managed to do and I think they are very important issues.

We have a lot of tourists coming, the business is working and there are investments. Obviously, we still have a lot to do to get closer to the European standards.

■ **Lina Grău:** You have mentioned the anti-corruption progress in Georgia. It is an important issue in the Republic of Moldova. Why is this important for democracy and for the country in general?

■ **Lasha Tughushi:** Because the citizens need to trust the state. They have to control the power, but at the same time, trust it. If the ordinary citizens know that everyone is asking for bribes, they don't trust the state. And when there is no such trust, especially when young people lose their confidence, this is a very frustrating situation- there is no energy, there is no desire to do anything, and there is no optimism. And this works against the country's development.

The people should know that the people whom we pay from the budget to which we contribute with taxes -deputies and ministers – live on their salaries. Maybe it sounds trivial, but that's why it's important that the level of corruption is not

very high. It is very bad when everyone is stealing.

The situation was very bad in our country, believe me. Georgia was one of the countries where the way of life was corruption. It was a difficult process to combat corruption, obviously, but it happened somehow that we fell asleep and then we woke up in another world. It was a very serious internal fight, but we succeeded. We went through a very painful process - 30,000 police were fired in one week, as well as many prosecutors, judges, and so on, and instead new and clean people were hired. So these draconian measures and very painful decisions have generated this result. There are situations in which it is necessary to act hard - legally, but very hard. And we have done it.

That was needed because it was already impossible to live in the country- people were suffocating and fleeing the country, especially young people. There was no prospect of living in a normal country. And the power at that time decided that way and it was backed by society.

■ **Lina Grău:** My impression is that in Moldova, on the contrary, at some point we woke up and then fell asleep again. It is a situation very similar to what you described in Georgia before the anti-corruption reforms - lack of prospects and exodus are what describe the Republic of Moldova at the moment. It's a bit inconvenient to ask you, because it's the Moldovan authorities that should answer this question - how can we get out of this situation?

■ **Lasha Tughushi:** I do not even know, maybe you still need to get to a point where the avalanche will start, like in the mountains. That's how it should be as patience has its limits.

I think that if this situation takes too long, you will get to a point when the corrupt civil servants will find it difficult. That is why the elites and the power as well as the leading parties must understand that the sooner they begin to make real reforms, the easier it will be for them. Or, otherwise, they have to understand that the time will come when they will talk with them in a different language. And I wouldn't wish it for anybody as I saw what this means - it's when mass of people go to jail.

And I do not think that in a country like Moldova the current situation can last for long. Because I have a lot of acquaintances and friends in Moldova who are all very clever and educated and also correct people. And these people deserve to have a country where there is not so much talk about corruption. I believe that there are a lot of good people in Moldova. I am, in principle, optimistic about the future of Moldova. I am sure this country has a very good future. I know many young people of quality and this is very important.

■ **Lina Grău:** Does the EU have any role in the process we are talking about? Are there real levers to influence the situation?

■ **Lasha Tughushi:** Yes, but, you know, it's like having a good

neighbour- he can help you, but he won't decide for you. If you don't want it, he won't give you a helping hand. He will do it once and a second time and if you ignore it ... All these things depend on us.

In Georgia, when it comes to anticorruption, we have surely been helped, but the decision to fight corruption belonged to the Georgian society. The Georgians themselves were prepared for change, because no European, American, German or French could force the police officer to take no bribes. It's impossible. They do not lead our countries, we have to do these things.

■ **Lina Grău:** Regarding the separatist structures in Georgia and the Republic of Moldova – has Russia's role increased there since the conflict in Ukraine?

■ **Lasha Tughushi:** My impression is that Russia has always wanted to re-establish control over the territories it controlled. And the means are different: through so-called soft power, or on the contrary, by military power, or by a hybrid combination. The idea is that they never gave up. And we need to know that if there is a tank somewhere, at a certain moment, it may shoot.

For example, 40 km from Tbilisi which is our capital, there are Russian military troops. We call them military occupation forces - not just us, but the majority of the civilized world. This is like an outpost for them as they always look at Tbilisi, Kutaisi or Batumi through the tank pipe.

Unfortunately, the politically modern Russia is set very aggressively - both in Ukraine and in Moldova,

everywhere. Unfortunately, Russia is communicating with its neighbours in a very brutal way and I think it is incorrect, because instead of looking for friends, it is looking for vassals. And we don't want to be vassals. Though small, we want to be a free, independent and prosperous country, living in the European space, being part of Europe and NATO.

Despite the hardships and the great pressure put on us through information and propaganda policies, we resist and I am optimistic about Georgia. I think we will never change our direction because we have always been part of the European civilization. We are an old nation, we have our culture and we have always looked towards Europe and have always considered Europe our home. And it doesn't matter if we are on the right or left side of the house, we want to live in this house.

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