

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

# NEWSLETTER

MONTHLY BULLETIN • JANUARY 2025 • NR. 1 (227)

## Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Mădălin Necșuțu, editor-coordinator

### TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. Ina Coseru, PAS MP: It will be regrettable if we do not understand how narrow and short this window of opportunity towards the EU is
2. Editorial by Madalin Necsutu: Moldova at the crossroads: all-out hybrid war in 2025 for parliamentary elections
3. Igor Munteanu, chairperson CUB: Internal consolidation means overhauling misconceptions about the exclusivity of a single governing party
4. Analysis by Natalia Stercul, executive director APE: 2025 Trends and Moldova's foreign policy

### News in Brief



The Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Roxana Mînzatu, said in an interview with Radio Chișinău that the European institutions will provide the Republic of Moldova with all possible support. "It is important to help the Republic of Moldova to have all the benefits that it can have as a candidate state – experts at the European level to come and help in adapting the legislation, joining some funding programmes. I manage the European Social Fund Plus, a fund that supports anti-poverty measures, the education and skills area, the social innovation area to which the Republic of Moldova is associated in order to be able to benefit from such resources", said the EU official. Roxana Mînzatu also spoke about the economic growth programme to be approved by the European Parliament, the legislation that will allow the Republic of Moldova to access significant funding from the European Commission and a pre-financing early next year of 115 million euro.



Moldovagaz is negotiating with Hungarian companies MOL and MVM on possible gas purchases for Transnistria. The information appeared on January 27 in the Russian publication Kommersant, which cited sources. Moldovagaz has not yet commented on the information. According to the Russian publication's sources, deliveries could start in February if agreements to this effect are concluded soon. For the time being, deliveries are expected by the end of March - early April. The delivery route and cost are still unclear. Transnistria needs about 3 million cubic meters of gas per day. Hungarian companies do not have free volumes of gas, they will have to look for it on the market at a high price, Russian expert Vitalii Ermakov was quoted by Kommersant as saying. The unrecognized administration in Tiraspol said that on 27 January the Commission for Exceptional Situations would examine the possibility of granting 3 million cubic meters of gas to the Transnistrian region.



The former mayor of Comrat, Nicolae Dudoglo, has announced the formation of a new political organization - the Gagauz People's Party. The party will be led by Dudoglo, a deputy in the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, according to the Nokta.md portal. At the party's founding congress, Dudoglo said that "the party is created, first of all, for Gagauzia to achieve freedom". He also noted that autonomy must get rid of the influence of "republican" parties. Dudoglo is the founder of several public organizations in Comrat, including the People's Patriotic Union "Devlet" and the organization "Yeni Gagauzia" - this organization joined the Democratic Party in 2013. From 2014 to April 2018, Dudoglo was a member of the Moldovan Parliament on the PDM's ticket. He also served as mayor of Comrat three times and ran four times for the post of Bashkan of Gagauzia, but never won. In the 2023 elections, he won about 9% of the vote.

## The year 2025, under the sign of unpredictability for Moldova



Deputies in the plenary session of the Parliament. Photo source: Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.

Moldova will face many challenges in 2025. Everything is unpredictable, because the energy crisis artificially created by Russia through the Transnistrian separatist region shows no signs of being resolved any time soon.

The authorities want to avoid a socio-economic crisis earlier this year that could escalate into political and security problems. Russia has prepared this scenario which could create destabilization for the Republic of Moldova

and partial problems for Ukraine. It depends on the ability of the leadership in Chișinău, but above all on the foreign partners as to how we will understand and especially how they will help the Republic of Moldova ▶

► to navigate these Russian-induced problems.

On the other hand, Russia understands that energy blackmail and the instrumentalization of this weapon are among the last effective methods of pressure it still has in Moldova and will play the “all or nothing” logic.

The political desideratum is that this summer’s parliamentary elections will create the necessary framework for a pro-European governing alliance. A second pro-European term in office would mean a closer rapprochement of the Republic of

Moldova with the EU and much more limited Russian influence and actions in the country.

Russia will do everything in its power to prevent Moldova from joining the European club. This depends on two extremely important aspects: Chisinau’s capacity for self-management and good governance, but also the amount of Western assistance and political commitment to Moldova’s European path.

Clearly, in 2025 we will all be keeping a close eye on the new White House administration’s new world order

moves and strategy. Certainly, the focus is on Ukraine, where US support for the Ukrainian military is vital in the war waged by Russia. When it comes to the USA-EU relations, this start of Donald Trump’s term in office will produce a number of unanticipated effects for Brussels. Moldova’s interest is that the window of opportunity it now has with the EU is not closed for various reasons.

All these challenges are highly unpredictable at this crucial start of the year for Moldova’s European course and its future options as a country.

*Madalin Necsutu*

## ***It will be regrettable if we do not understand how narrow and short this window of opportunity towards the EU is***

***Ina Coseru, MP of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter in which we discussed the energy crisis created by Russia in the Transnistrian separatist region with the aim of economically and socially destabilizing Moldova ahead of this year’s parliamentary elections. We also talked about how crises can be turned into opportunities, about PAS priorities in relation to other parties in order to keep Moldova on the European course, but also about possible peace scenarios in Ukraine. All these are among the most important challenges of the Moldovan leadership in 2025. So we invite you to read more about all these issues in the following lines:***



■ **What are the most important challenges in 2025 for the Republic of Moldova? And I would like to start with the energy and humanitarian crisis in the Transnistrian region, which was deliberately provoked by the Russian Federation before the parliamentary elections due this year?**

■ It depends on whether we move further along the path of European integration or the situation may change. Whether things will come to a standstill or whether things will slow down.

The citizens of the Republic of Moldova choose European integration and expect our country to be part of the European Union. This humanitarian crisis in the Transnistrian region is very dangerous and the Russian Federation, which is very keen to see us back in its sphere of influence, is playing this card. It depends now on how we will be able to overcome this crisis and whether we will also be able to see it as an opportunity to reintegrate our country.

***Crisis or opportunity?***

■ **We know that any crisis also brings opportunities, but does the Republic of Moldova have the capacity to somehow take advantage of this crisis to resolve this Transnistrian file that has been dragging on for over 30 years? Could it also be a new crisis that would be difficult for PAS to manage, but also an opportunity to perhaps salvage a first term in office marked by many overlapping crises?**

■ It is obvious that it is also an opportunity, it's just that every crisis, as we have seen in the past - the energy crisis of 2021, the war of 2022 triggered by the Russian Federation in Ukraine with all its consequences for the Republic of Moldova – has costed us a lot. We have paid very high costs. In 2021, when the energy crisis started, which was not just a crisis, but an instrument of blackmail by the Russian Federation, applied not just in the Republic of Moldova but throughout the European continent, cost us all, including countries in Europe which have large financial resources. We should invest these resources in alternative energy production, in the search for new energy sources and so on.

The Transnistrian crisis is exactly the same. It is an opportunity, but it also implies certain costs that we need to be able to pay in order to move quickly towards this goal - the reintegration of the country.

However, when we talk about the reintegration of the Transnistrian region into the Republic of Moldova, we have to assume all the costs that this entails. There are over 300 000 citizens on the left bank of the Dniester and they are all Moldovan citizens.

Every payment – salaries, pensions, social payments, compensation – that we have been making to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova since the energy crisis started – and we are talking about hundreds of millions of euros that has been offered by European partners – has been to pay compensations so that citizens do not pay those new high

tariffs. Because while the prices of energy resources have increased, the salaries and pensions did not double or triple. It was not possible to do that, because we were and still are in the vicinity of a war.

This situation is that the economic sector cannot develop to the extent that we would like to. New investors are not coming. Investors who are in the Republic of Moldova are afraid for their future. Some of them are leaving because nobody knows when the war will stop. This is despite the fact that 2025, as the new President of the United States of America says, is the year when he wants a peace agreement to be signed. And here, of course, the Transnistrian region can be a component of that agreement, because that is how we would like to see that agreement.

***Transnistrian conflict to go hand in hand with peace in Ukraine?***

■ **Will you try to push the Transnistrian file, as far as possible, on the agenda of the upcoming peace talks between Ukraine and Russia?**

■ Exactly. We are talking about the Transnistrian region with the Russian military troops and the stockpile of munitions at Colbasna on the border with Ukraine. All this continues to jeopardize the security of this state, if the peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine is signed without the Transnistrian issue being taken into account.

Now, even under these conditions, we understand that the Russian Federation has done everything possible to advance on the southern front line in Ukraine in order to be able to make that junction with the Transnistrian region, so that it can control the entire southern part of Ukraine. Ukraine also has an interest in seeing the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict and the establishment of security here in the region as a further guarantee of what a lasting peace means.

Because even if Ukraine does not become a NATO member in the near future, those guarantees will allow Ukraine to maintain peace for a longer period of time. They are absolutely necessary to be included in this peace agreement. Therefore, the Transnistrian region is one of those guarantees.

■ **How do you see Russia's actions in addition to this energy crisis it is generating? Do you see perhaps an acceleration of propaganda and other elements of hybrid warfare as we get closer to the date of this year's parliamentary elections?**

■ Yes, we will continue to see these actions. The propaganda has not stopped. We saw it in the autumn last year, when it intensified at full speed. Russian propaganda has intoxicated our society, especially people who are Russian-speaking. I am constantly explaining this and emphasizing it to our development partners.

We have citizens of the Republic of Moldova who have been living in European countries for more than 10 years and understand very well what the European Union means. But we have also Moldovan citizens who speak Russian and we need to reach out to them. It is very important to reach out with messages also in the space of toxic propaganda, which, of course, ruins any perception of European integration. Propaganda is based and built strictly on people's fears.

Propaganda claims that European integration would mean war for us, or we will freeze and have nothing to eat and so on. So it is important to communicate with these people who are victims of Russian propaganda and it is important to do it the languages spoken in the Republic of Moldova.

***More effective dialogue and more accurate messages to the public***

■ **Do you plan to do more grassroots, more door-to-door campaigning, more talking to people than you have done so far?**

■ We have done this every time, in every type of election. In 2016, we worked with grassroots people. The important thing is, as I said, to speak both in Romanian and Russian, so that we do not have a bigger and bigger camp of people who do not understand what is happening - people who do not understand what reforms are being implemented in the country, what the energy crisis means and perceive it in a different

way, that is, according to the false narratives of propaganda.

So, it is important to communicate, to learn from the lessons of the last year's presidential election campaign with those 10% of fraudulent votes. We need to stop admitting that in this year's parliamentary election campaign.

It is good to communicate with all the pro-European parties in order to have a common message, because we are quite divided and this time I think the people are going to penalise us for that.

***Negotiations and scenarios for possible pro-European alliances***

■ **It is very hard to believe that PAS will be able to get enough votes to govern on its own, as it is the case at present. Do you currently have a strategy to discuss possible governing coalitions with various pro-European political parties? Have you started such discussions or is it too early and you are waiting for the results of the parliamentary elections?**

■ We have started to discuss with several pro-European parties in order to find that formula and format through which we can consolidate, either in an electoral bloc or as part of a joint electoral list. It does not matter what the consolidation of pro-European forces will look like.

If this does not happen, I believe that the pro-European parties will

have more to lose than to gain, but we need to do our best to ensure that we continue to secure the European course.

This is what the whole of Europe – which has opened so many doors for us in such a short time, in record time, even in the situation when some reforms have only started but have not yet borne fruit – is waiting for. It's high time now to deliver new results. Everyone expects us to secure the European course. That is what we need to do.

### ***Ambitious plans for relations with Brussels***

■ **My last question is about European integration and reforms. Do you plan to accelerate these processes in these six months or so of your mandate? Where are we now in this respect?**

■ We have prepared ourselves, when it comes to bilateral screening, to request the opening of negotiations on some chapters of the first cluster related to fundamental issues and the *acquis communautaire*. More specifically, on the part relating to democratic institutions, the justice sector and public administration, because this is where we would like to prepare very well and quickly, with the full support of our European partners. In this way, we can prepare for the next elections, but with the reforms of the democratic institutions in place, because the democratic institutions and this chapter of the fundamental issues are related to the electoral system, media and

free speech. This is where we need to have more lessons learnt and be able to apply them.

At the same time, the justice sector is a chapter, as the Europeans say, with which accession negotiations open and close. However, justice reform does not happen overnight. The example of the Balkan countries demonstrates this. But, of course, I don't want anyone to understand it as an excuse.

We need to move fast and learn from what is there, from the example of the Balkans, and take the best practices. Now in the first half of the year, Poland will hold the presidency of the European Council and we will ask for the opening of accession negotiations on these chapters. I hope that in spring we will be able to move because we have already completed the bilateral screening process.

We also have the position of European partners on these chapters. We will also have messages to communicate to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova in the parliamentary election campaign, in case we succeed on this dimension again. Because this is what we communicated to the population in 2024 – when the referendum on European integration was held – that things happened very quickly and the Europeans helped us.

EU states got organized very quickly and approved the candidate status in 2022. As a result, we worked on that list of conditionalities, after

which in October 2023 the report was issued and in December 2023 the negotiations were approved. Then we also requested that the intergovernmental conference be organized in the first half of 2024. Even this happened though nobody believed that we would succeed. But it was achieved. So if we continue to keep this very high speed in the European integration process, we will also have certain messages in the election campaign.

The openness of Europeans is unbelievable, it's maximum. All the European Union countries that I personally visited together with my colleagues asked us how they can help us. They told us: we are here with financial resources, with institutional memory, with all the examples, you just have to tell us what you need, make a list of needs.

Now only one thing is expected from us – to win the elections, to unite all the European forces and to move forward so that we can fulfil the promise and the goal we have set ourselves, namely that the Republic of Moldova will become a member of the European Union in 2030.

It may be a little late in happening, but the window of opportunity is open now. Such moments do not come very often in history and we need to make the most of them. It will be regrettable if we do not understand how narrow and short this window of opportunity is for Moldova's accession to the EU.

■ **Thank you!**

## Editorial

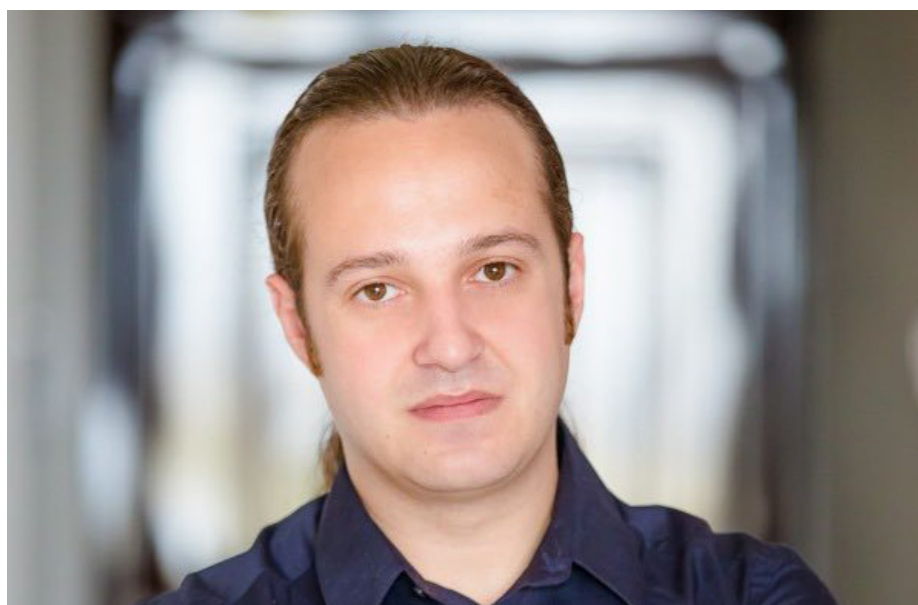
# Moldova at the crossroads: all-out hybrid war in 2025 for parliamentary elections

*Editorial by Madalin Necutu,  
journalist with TVR Moldova and  
Balkan Insight*

Moldova is facing a crucial year for its post-Soviet existence. The zero priority in 2025 for Moldova will be to stay on the European course for another electoral cycle after the parliamentary elections scheduled most likely this autumn.

The presidential elections and the referendum on European integration have shown a very high polarization in society and a 59.45 percent support for the idea of European integration. This is not because the European project is not very attractive to citizens, but rather the lack of trust in the EU is caused by Moscow's intense hybrid war to curtail Moldova's European course. All through intense online and social media propaganda and the creation of a machine for voting against payment through the fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor.

Investigating and punishing the coordinators of Ilan Shor's octopus must be an immediate priority for the investigative bodies. It is very likely that in the 2025 parliamentary elections, Moscow and its cronies will try to repeat the scheme in the



absence of firm deterrent convictions for those involved in election fraud.

### **Sabotaging the coalition of pro-European forces**

The attempted fraud is likely to intensify even further, as the stakes for Moscow are high if the creation of a pro-European coalition fails. A second pro-European parliamentary cycle would mean the completion of structural reforms essential for the Europeanization of Moldova, particularly in the area of justice and the rule of law.

Most likely, Moscow will step up its action through the classic levers – the “fifth column” represented by pro-Kremlin politicians and parties, the Moldovan Metropolis which is nothing but an extension of the Moscow Patriarchate to which it is subordinated, as well as the Russian-speaking citizens of the Gagauz and Transnistrian regions that Russia holds hostage to a *Russkii Mir* without prospects.

This is precisely why the pro-European forces need to sit down at the negotiating table now, in the twelfth hour. The ruling party needs to break out of the

paradigm and comfort zone of the single ruling party, while the other pro-European political forces need to put aside their resentments, whether justified or not.

Moldova's goal is to join the EU by 2030, which is why it is vital that pro-European forces start talks on forming a coalition now, and not only after the results of the parliamentary elections are known.

### **Crisis or opportunity?**

However, Moldova will also need to focus its attention on resolving the Transnistrian issue, either by reintegrating the region, which has been under de facto Russian control since 1992, or by integrating this separatist enclave into the EU along the lines of Cyprus.

This may represent the biggest threat in 2025, but also the biggest opportunity for Moldova to resolve this frozen conflict of more than three decades on its territory. Russia is currently attempting energy blackmail against Chisinau by refusing to support the breakaway Transnistrian separatist region with free gas, as it has done for decades. In other words, Russia is condemning its 220 000 or so citizens in Transnistria to the cold in order to create a humanitarian crisis for Moldova ahead of the parliamentary elections.

By refusing to deliver gas to Transnistria, Moldova, which used to buy about 80 percent of its electricity from the Moldgres thermoelectric power plant in Transnistria, is now forced to buy more expensive electricity on the open market.

Gazprom is deliberately violating the Moldovan gas supply contract valid until 2026. Moscow refuses to deliver gas, although it can do so through the trans-Balkan pipeline via Turkey - Bulgaria - Romania.

Even though Romania has come to the rescue and capped the price of electricity deliveries at a price even lower than for Romanian consumers, it is nowhere near the price Moldova used to pay for electricity supplies from Moldgres. This inevitably leads to higher bills, spiralling prices and a lower standard of living, which creates dissatisfaction and anxiety among Moldovan citizens.

In parallel, Moscow and Tiraspol have pushed false narratives that the crisis is due to the pro-European government in Chisinau. The first is that the authorities in Chisinau have been unable to negotiate and pressure Kiev to continue allowing Russian gas transit to Europe from 2025. The second false narrative concerns the fact that Moldova has an alleged USD 709 million debt to Gazprom that it has not paid. But an independent

international audit in October 2023 established that Moldova owes Gazprom only USD 8 million, which Chisinau wanted to pay but was refused by the Russian energy giant.

Stopping the free gas given by Russia to the Transnistrian region would be tantamount to the economic collapse of the region, which is only a matter of months away. This would mean a sudden reintegration of the region. Experts estimate that the reintegration of the breakaway region would require an effort of around EUR 500 million annually in the first three years alone.

According to figures from Chisinau, there are 148,000 pensioners and about 62,000 unemployed out of a population of about 350,000 people in the region. Their sudden inclusion in Moldova's pension and social system would create serious difficulties for Moldova, which would not be able to cope without the help of external partners.

In addition to the economic and social problems caused by the sudden reintegration caused by Russia's manoeuvring against Chisinau, Moldova would also receive a significant infusion of pro-Russian voters who may shift the sensitive balance and tip the political scales in favour of pro-Russian forces. In this scenario, Russia will achieve its political and strategic goal of derailing Moldova from the European axis.

## **Uncertain outcome of Ukraine war**

Last but not least, Moldova's situation in 2025 also depends on the outcome of the war on the Ukrainian front. Ukraine continues to act as a shield for the defence of Moldova, especially in the south-western region of Odessa, which prevents a possible junction of Russian troops invading Ukraine with those of the separatist Transnistrian region, which was the original plan of the Russian forces.

Kiev has an interest in maintaining a pro-European government in Chisinau so as not to create additional problems behind the front lines. Likewise, the Transnistrian region is a constant threat that does not allow Kiev to mobilize all its troops on the Eastern front in the fight against Russia.

Moreover, Moldova's National Defense Strategy for 2024-2034, approved by Parliament on December 27, identifies a number of risks and threats to national defence, such as the establishment by the Russian Federation of a land military corridor to Moldova's borders. In a first for Moldova,

Russia is expressly defined as the main threat to the country's security.

The strategic document also reveals the threat of hybrid actions against Moldova, the illegal stationing of Russian military forces on the territory of our country, as well as the armed formations of the unconstitutional regime in the Transnistrian region.

The outcome of the war in Ukraine also greatly depends on the stability and security of Moldova, which could fall victim to Russian aggression. Moldova is not part of any military bloc and has a precarious military endowment which does not allow a decent level of deterrence or defence. However, Moldova has invested significantly in its defence and has increased its defence budget up to 100 million euros annually, far more than the allocations of previous years. Also, the illegal presence of some 1,600 Russian military personnel on its territory in the breakaway Transnistrian region can only be a source of insecurity for Moldova.

In Transnistria, all institutions are militarized, and their command

is provided by officers loyal to Moscow. These paramilitary troops number around 15,000 people with a pro-Moscow mentality who know how to handle weapons. It is in Russia's interest to thwart any drive by Chisinau to move closer to NATO and the EU on security and defence. Neutrality will continue to be used by pro-Russian political forces as a pretext to stop any significant modernization of Chisinau's defence capabilities.

All these elements make the Republic of Moldova a mix of insecurity, unpredictability that can degenerate and escalate the current haze of calm into a hurricane whose devastating effect cannot be anticipated. Russia is forcing and playing a destabilization card inside the Republic of Moldova. Chisinau and partners must show more resilience in 2025 than in previous years and allow Moscow to implement its plan at any cost. It is also up to the Moldovan citizens whether they will allow themselves to be manipulated or will have the mental strength to get out of the grips of the manipulative hybrid war waged by Moscow, whether they can think and act European or not.



# Internal consolidation means overhauling misconceptions about the exclusivity of a single governing party



**Igor Munteanu, leader of the Coalition for Unity and Prosperity Party (CUB), gave an interview to the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter in which we discussed the main challenges Moldova will face this year. We talked about the energy crisis in the Transnistrian region caused by Russia's ambitions to destabilize the Republic of Moldova and the levers of pressure Moscow still exerts on Chisinau. We discussed Russia's proxy war in Ukraine and its impact on Moldova. Last but not least, we talked about how vital it is for all pro-European forces to come together ahead of this year's elections to face the Kremlin's growing threats to the Republic of Moldova and, by extension, to the whole of Europe. We invite you to read the full interview with Igor Munteanu, leader of the CUB and former Moldovan Ambassador to the USA.**

■ **What are the main challenges for the Republic of Moldova in 2025? I would like to start with the energy crisis that Russia is causing in the Republic of Moldova: what is its impact and how can it evolve?**

■ The energy crisis needs to be seen in a wider context in which Eastern Europe is a target of the Russian Federation in a war it declared in 2014-2015, when Russia categorically opposed the inclusion of the Eastern Partnership

countries in an Association Agreement with the European Union. Since then, it has constantly ventured and raised the stakes on several levels. The energy crisis is therefore part of a long-term strategy in which, first and foremost, the Russian Federation has sought the capitulation of the European Union.

Because when your energy market depends 35% on hydrocarbons and gas imported from Russia, your principledness is diminished by

economic interest. So, Russia aimed to hit the transatlantic relationship and the small vulnerable states.

But let's get back to today's current events. The Russian Federation considers the tools it has at its disposal – energy and intimidation and fear of high prices – for capitulation of governments. If the populations of our countries were more prosperous, Russian intimidation would not work, because we would adapt completely to the European market, prices, and tariffs.

In that case, the Russian Federation would not be able to impose its point of view. But as long as the Republic of Moldova has remained dependent on and anchored to an electricity supply network inherited from the Soviet regime and maintaining prices through subsidization policies for the poor population, the Russian Federation has considered that it is entitled to intervene with aggressive campaigns and propaganda.

Ukraine has naturally decoupled as a result of defending itself from foreign military intervention. In contrast, the Republic of Moldova has not immediately decoupled, even after 2022, erroneously believing that the Russian Federation will not have a policy of disconnecting its highly vulnerable separatist enclave [Transnistrian region], but financially and energetically patronized by the Russian Federation.

Until the very last minute, Chisinau maintained an erroneous thesis that we

are safe and that the Russian Federation will not stop supplying natural gas to the Transnistrian separatist region for nothing, from which we will get the electricity we need.

This point of view was erroneous and emphasized, in any case, the delusion of the current Recean government in the context in which the Russian Federation sees around it only victims or only adversaries.

### **Energy independence as “zero priority”**

#### **■ Where does the Republic of Moldova stand in this context from Russia’s perspective?**

■ We certainly cannot be an adversary of the Russian Federation, but we are certainly its victim. The escalation of the situation or these crises has demonstrated first of all that the Russian Federation does not value the attachment to *Russkii Mir* of the population on the left bank of the Dniester. Secondly, the Russian Federation’s first and foremost concern is to overthrow the government in Chisinau and then to maintain a policy of patronage in relation to its regional clientele. Under these circumstances, surely the only option the government has at the moment is not to delude itself, to accelerate to the best of our ability the works on the connection of high-voltage power lines with Romania and the EU, so that natural gas and electricity do not depend on the Transnistrian Moldgros or external actors.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the energy crisis is just one component of Moldova’s economic vulnerabilities. Because there is no point in making the connection if the population is not be able to pay those tariffs.

The adaptation of the population to Romanian tariffs and the European market is a mandatory condition. It is as important as implementing the *acquis communautaire*. And for that you need to invest heavily in economic recovery, in attracting investment and increasing the welfare of the population

While it may seem to some like some kind of rosy dream, this is the only way to decoupling from the harmful influence of the Russian Federation – increasing the incomes of the population, increasing the economic resilience and the ability of the population to withstand any kind of shocks delivered with kindness from the imperialist metropolis.

### **Transactionalism and its effects**

#### **■ Another challenge that we see as extremely important is Russia’s war in Ukraine and its impact on Moldova. What can we expect from this perspective in 2025 for the Republic of Moldova?**

■ Apparently, the objectives formulated by the new US President Donald Trump, namely that in 24 hours he will end the war, have aroused nothing but hilarity. Because this war cannot be ended by a deal made without substantial geopolitical effort.

And I think that after handing over the obligation to set the necessary conditions on a ‘big deal’ to General Keith Kellogg [special representative for the Ukraine-Russia conflict], we should expect these two sides to start negotiating – America and Russia.

At the same time, this war will not come to an end if Ukraine’s interests are severely damaged and Ukraine does not receive any assurances or guarantees about its future. This means that a “big deal” like Yalta or Munich will not solve

the problem over the Ukrainians’ heads. And this is a matter of principle.

### **Looking for solid security guarantees**

#### **■ How is the Republic of Moldova affected by these deals and what can Chisinau do about it?**

■ The Republic of Moldova is in the same context of insecurity and conventional and hybrid attacks as Georgia, for example, and it is very carefully dodging. This is what we have seen in the last few years of PAS government, not to provoke, although this is almost impossible to avoid. The Republic of Moldova, too, need to look for other viable, solid security guarantees which will guarantee its citizens that in the event of a shaky peace, the Russian Federation will not feel entitled to come to Chisinau and install its own puppet governments. And this, again, is not just about the gifts we may or may not receive, but about a few important things.

About a plan B – that means a plan that is shared and assumed by the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Poland – to defend our borders and our population, first of all. And, secondly, we certainly need more internal cohesion, so that these plans do not reverberate only to the party in government, but also to the majority of the population.

There must be a consensus of the majority of the population on what we want. There must be consensus on our desire to be protected and not to encourage military intervention to come upon us.

And that calls for different approaches from the government than it has shown in the last four years, in my view. Of course, in addition to the efforts being made by the United States to bring

Russia to the negotiating table in a formula that accepts the preservation of Ukrainian statehood and the preservation of large parts of the territory that belongs to the Ukrainian state, the Europeans have so far been missing from this equation. And this is very regrettable.

Because on the one hand, this signals once again to the Russian Federation that Brussels doesn't matter, just as the voices of the European community don't matter, only a peace of two in a duet between the Americans and the Russians.

### **Enhancing the EU's role on the international stage by revitalizing the military industrial complex**

■ **What is to be done in such a context? What could be the solutions for the EU?**

■ This, in a way, neglects the importance and strategic value of the European Union in the wider framework. It will be up to European leaders – from NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte to the most influential states in Central and Western Europe – to find ways to be relevant.

And that means restarting the military-industrial complex, attaching the European identity to the military budgets that are sure to increase, and preparing contingency plans, both military and economic.

The fact that, for example, since January, natural gas imports from the Russian Federation have increased 12-fold since January, speaks to the fact that European economies have still not adapted to this confrontation with their Eastern neighbour and adversary. And I do not know whether this vulnerability

will be compensated immediately with liquefied gas supplies from the USA. Although that would be a solution, it also depends on prices and it depends on the respect that the USA will show from now on towards the European identity.

So to be European is to be weak or vulnerable, and this is a principled or strategic issue on the agenda of all states that are part of the European space, behind the curtain or inside the club.

### **Compromise and unity ahead of parliamentary elections**

■ **How important is it for the pro-European forces to come together at this crucial moment for the future of the Republic of Moldova as we prepare for parliamentary elections and how much willingness do you see on the part of all Moldovan pro-European forces to compromise for a future alliance in order to re-establish a pro-European governing coalition for the next four years?**

■ First of all, if we are talking about compromises, they are expected from the most powerful actor, formally, nominally and in general. That is about the strongest party in government today. Compromises from actors who are not represented in the current parliament is an illusion or naivety.

Secondly, the central element of a "Snagov Pact" is our ability to understand the need for a concert of voices and arguments for Moldova's transformation, not a monopoly on power and a rejection of any critical views.

From this point of view, internal consolidation means first and foremost revisiting the misconceptions about the uniqueness or exclusivity or exclusive privilege of a single ruling party over

all levers of power and historical truth. From this point of view, the year 2025 will be a chance to rethink the way in which pro-European actors will construct their plans or projections for the future, but it will also be a test of maturity of those in government.

If they want to retain power without yielding any of that power or without realizing that past mistakes have led to the very precarious state of governance. And not just because of the war or because of the Russians or because of the hybrid wars, but primarily because of the limited competence on strategic areas, economic growth, the functioning of democratic institutions, the key reforms that were promised and undelivered and the inclusion policy. And I am referring here not only to the inclusion of minorities or the inclusion of vulnerable groups, but, first and foremost, to the inclusion of points of view that must be complementary in an effort that can under no circumstances belong to a single political force.

In this dimension of consolidation, as you say, an important role will also be played by friendly governments in the immediate neighbourhood or in Western Europe. Because the crisis situation that is being maintained and is worsening at the moment is also the result of the short-sightedness they have shown over the years and the monopoly on political power that they have tolerated from the Action and Solidarity Party.

In order to be objectively connected to the truth, we need to understand other dimensions that sometimes may not be favourable, or may not be favourable and pleasant, but they are extremely necessary in order to understand how to get out of this systemic crisis in which we find ourselves at the beginning of 2025.

■ **Thank you!**

# 2025 Trends and Moldova's foreign policy

*Analysis by Natalia Stercul,  
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**The year 2025 brings radical changes for the entire international community and promises to be extremely challenging. Analysts, experts, academics, and politicians continue to ponder what lies ahead and what needs to be accomplished. Changes at the White House, maintaining the European Union's leadership positions, Russia's war against Ukraine and the increased focus on the Middle East are the main topics of debate. For the Republic of Moldova, the priority foreign policy direction will remain progress in the EU accession negotiations, which must be achieved in the context of the energy crisis and growing economic tensions in the run-up to the upcoming parliamentary elections.**

There are also pleasant events ahead, linked to a series of anniversaries that clearly demonstrate the progress and achievements of the European community. It is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Schuman Declaration, 30 years of EU membership of Austria, Finland and Sweden, and 40 years since the creation of the Schengen area, where freedom of movement is the golden rule. As of 1 January 2025, Romania and Bulgaria will become an integral part of this area, which will undoubtedly bring a number of benefits to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, such as increased mobility, easier travel, travel and tourism, as well as



support for the country's European path. With these various events in mind, let's analyse what will be the main trends that will define the world in 2025 and what the Republic of Moldova can expect.

## **What changes is America's Golden Age bringing to the world?**

One of the most remarkable international events of the new year 2025 was the inauguration of Donald Trump, who officially took office as President of the United States on 20 January 2025. The changes in the White House associated with Trump's coming to power will significantly transform the foreign policy agenda not only of the United States, but also of other global actors such as the EU, China and Russia. The phrase of his inaugural speech – "[America's Golden Age begins right now](#)" – is being heavily promoted in the

international press, along with his declaration to stop the war in Ukraine. There is no doubt that the new US President's commitment to end the war, which has already dragged on for three long years, will be backed up by concrete action. Trump has already announced that he plans to meet with the Russian president, saying: "He needs to make a deal. I think he is destroying Russia by refusing to make a deal." However, will this bring an end to the war in Ukraine? Will it lead to a consensus between Russia and Ukraine to stop hostilities this year? Will Western partners be able to provide essential security guarantees for Ukraine's future? Will peace be established or just a temporary truce? These questions remain unanswered. But it is clear that security and resilience will remain central issues for the Republic of Moldova and other countries in the region this year in the context of growing regional tensions.

### **Increased defence spending in NATO countries**

In this context, changes to international security, including increasing NATO countries' defence spending from 2 to 5 per cent of GDP— a request Trump plans to make to NATO member states – should be considered. The proposal is likely to be clarified at the NATO Summit, scheduled for June 2025 to be held in The Hague, Netherlands. Adopting such a decision will require the agreement of all 32-member states.

It should be recalled that European countries increased their defence budgets after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and many leaders have said the increase needs to continue to deal with the growing military threat from Moscow. However, not all European countries are on board with increased defence spending. For example, nominally Germany is the European leader in spending, with nearly USD 98 billion invested in 2024 in strengthening its defence capabilities. However, this amount accounts for only 2.12 per cent of GDP, less than many other NATO member states spend relative to GDP. Efforts to increase this amount have sparked controversy and led to the fall of Germany's government in December 2024.

Another example is France. Political instability has disrupted plans to increase defence spending in the short term. President Emmanuel Macron lost his parliamentary majority in early summer elections, making it impossible to approve the 2025 budget. France's defence spending remains at the 2024 levels, making the planned USD 3 billion increase impossible. France's main parliamentary parties have other budget priorities, such as increased

social spending and tax cuts. Thus, military support for Ukraine at previous levels remains uncertain

### **Future realities of the Moldovan-American dialog**

Moldovan-American relations no longer seem as transparent as they were during the Biden administration, when Moldova enjoyed unconditional US support and assistance. As it is well known, since his first day in office, President Trump has rescinded 78 executive orders and memoranda issued by his predecessor. Foreign financial assistance for development has been suspended pending an assessment of its effectiveness and compatibility with Trump's foreign policy. In her congratulatory message to the 47<sup>th</sup> US President, Maia Sandu emphasized: "Moldova values its strong relations with the US and looks forward to close cooperation to ensure the security, energy cooperation and prosperity of both countries." Certainly, US support to Moldova will continue, but the extent of this support remains uncertain. Much will depend on how the Trump administration positions its policy on the conflict in Ukraine and its relations with Russia.

### **Geo-economic uncertainty and potential risks for the Republic of Moldova**

In addition to security issues, the international community continues to face economic challenges. It is no coincidence that another major event – the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, held on 20-24 January 2025 – began with the question "How can economic growth be revived?". Representatives from more than 130 countries debated geo-economic uncertainties, trade tensions and

rethinking growth processes. This raises concerns, but at the same time underlines the inevitability of the accelerated development of innovations – artificial intelligence, quantum computing and biotechnologies – to boost productivity and living standards. According to the WEF's Global Risks 2025 report, armed conflicts top the list, followed by extreme weather events and geo-economic clashes. Continued geopolitical tensions amplify uncertainty, affect investment, weaken long-term productive potential, slow economic growth and reduce employment. This means that economic risks will prevail for EU countries, which will inevitably also have an impact on the Republic of Moldova, located in the immediate vicinity of the open war zone between Russia and Ukraine.

Moreover, the Republic of Moldova entered 2025 with an emergency situation in the energy sector, declared at the end of the previous year, marked by rising energy tariffs and a worsening economic situation. The support offered by neighbouring Romania, by granting priority access to its gas deposits, is a significant help. However, Romania's current capacity to export energy to the Republic of Moldova does not exceed 400 MW, which is insufficient to cover the country's needs in full, given the suspension of the Cuciurgan power plant.

Problems related to the energy crisis caused by the consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine were discussed during the visit of Moldovan President Maia Sandu to Kiev on 25 January 2025. Security, energy, infrastructure, trade and mutual support on the path to EU membership are the pillars of bilateral relations between Moldova

and Ukraine in these difficult circumstances. Analysts' economic forecasts also remain pessimistic, predicting not only a complicated winter, but also a difficult recovery period for Moldova.

### **Progress in EU accession negotiations 'zero priority'**

The energy crisis and economic difficulties are undoubtedly affecting the rating of the Moldovan authorities, which will have consequences for the upcoming parliamentary elections. These elections will be the main challenge of the current year and will determine whether the continuity in the implementation of reforms on the European path of the Republic of Moldova will be maintained. Given the massive external interference in the electoral and democratic processes of the Republic of Moldova, aimed at undermining the country's European course, as well as the hybrid attacks, threats, blackmail, propaganda and political manipulation promoted by Russia to destabilize society, including through illegal financing of political forces, Moldova faces an uphill

battle this year. The referendum for EU integration, in which 50.38% of citizens voted, and the presidential elections won by pro-European President Maia Sandu have secured Moldova a strategic direction towards the EU. However, instability in this regard continues to be a major long-term challenge for the country's European course.

The division of society and existing social differences need to be taken into account by the authorities. Moldova is still at the crossroads between Russia and the West. The forthcoming parliamentary elections, in which the Action and Solidarity Party will face pro-Russian forces, will decide the path Moldova will follow in the coming years, as well as the current pace of European reforms. Russia's intervention in the electoral processes is a challenge not only for the Moldovan authorities, but also for Romania, the neighbour which consistently supports Moldova's European course and constantly offers assistance in resolving and preventing crises.

The current authorities are trying to gain the support of external

partners, realizing the importance of a common political will and maintaining a pro-European stance in order to continue reforms. This was also reflected in the statements of Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Cristina Gherasimov in Brussels during the talks on January 20-22 on Moldova's competition legislation, a fundamental aspect of the European single market. The results of the reforms are essential for progress in the EU accession negotiations. Among the priorities is also the acceleration of the absorption of European funds from the EUR1.8 billion investment plan proposed by the European Union.

The transformations that are taking place will therefore bring significant changes, with an impact on both global politics and the regions. It is essential for the Republic of Moldova to withstand these difficult times, to maintain its resilience and commitment to the European path, while at the same time make progress in the EU accession negotiations through successful implementation of reforms.

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