

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

# NEWSLETTER

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## Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Mădălin Necșuțu, editor-coordinator

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### News in Brief



The Republic of Moldova has come a long way closer to the European Union, but if, after this year's parliamentary elections, pro-Russian parties take office, Chisinau risks losing the 1.9 billion euro in financial support from the European Union, Romanian MEP Siegfried Mureșan said in an interview published on February 23 by TVR Moldova. "I say very clearly: if an anti-European government were to come in, by absurdity, everything that has been achieved risks being lost. Just as Viktor Orban in Hungary, by attacking the European Union, lost 20 billion euros in European funds, the same would happen in Chisinau. I don't want this to happen, but if in the Republic of Moldova there was an anti-European government that violated European rules, the EU would legally no longer be able to provide this funding," said the European official. The Romanian MEP also underlined that the first money from the €1.9 billion package would be transferred in April, while the next tranche in July.



The Republic of Moldova can hold parliamentary elections this year from mid-July to early October, Deputy Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission Pavel Postica told the Realitatea TV. "This would be the three-month period during which, according to the law, ordinary elections are to be organized. From my personal point of view, the later, the better, so that we, the Central Electoral Commission, can prepare well for the upcoming elections," said Pavel Postica. The political and legal decision belongs to the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, said the CEC deputy chairman. "We have to take into account that after every election certain shortcomings are identified, including in the law, things that are somehow interpretable, unclear and need to be adjusted," Pavel Postica said.



Amnesty International Moldova demanded justice for Ukraine and compensation for the victims of the war at a protest on 24 February in front of the Russian Embassy in Chisinau. The demonstrators chose to protest in silence as a sign of mourning for the lives lost in the war waged by Moscow. "Our main message: we demand justice for the victims. Children, civilians have suffered throughout these years. Civilian infrastructure has been destroyed. According to United Nations data, some 2,500 children were killed or seriously injured. More than 1,500 schools were completely destroyed or severely damaged," said Veaceslav Tofan, Executive Director of Amnesty International Moldova. He added that the protest is a wake-up call about "the fragility of fundamental rights in the face of an aggressor and in the face of such a strong boot of the occupier".

## Moldova at an inflection point: reintegration of the Transnistrian region, between opportunity and drudgery



The building of the Supreme Soviet (the so-called Parliament) in Tiraspol. Photo: Cornelia Cozonac

The Republic of Moldova is facing historic moments that it will have to manage carefully, but also courageously. Not only is an unprecedented window of opportunity open for the Republic of Moldova in terms of EU accession, but also an extremely important

one, for the first time, to resolve the Transnistrian issue.

For the first time in its history, the Republic of Moldova has more leverage than ever before to put an end to the situation in this region that runs on free Russian

gas. Thanks to Ukraine's intervention, Chisinau now has the bread and the knife in this business called Transnistria. With the completion of the Isaccea-Vulcanesti-Chisinau high-voltage line, Tiraspol will lose all its political and economic trump cards in its

► relations with Chisinau and will have only the military option. Most probably, however, thanks to Ukraine, Tiraspol will not be able to access it.

So, under these conditions, everything depends on Chisinau's political will and especially on the commitment of Western partners to financially support the Republic of Moldova in the integration of the two banks of the river Dniestr.

Obviously, in order not to jeopardize the European course, this reintegration

can only come about gradually and in a controlled manner. It is extremely important that it should happen in this way, if we only think of the German reintegration model, which is still not, after three decades, a complete one, and this was seen in the way the people of eastern Germany voted, namely the far-right, pro-Russian and anti-European option.

However, the Republic of Moldova needs to put on the table with its allies a plan that is well thought out from all perspectives and then negotiate

the best possible support for its implementation.

It will not be an easy process, but it is the first time that Moldova has to manage two major dossiers simultaneously, and the authorities' mission to succeed is more important than ever. Every crisis also creates opportunities, so it is up to the ability of the current pro-European forces to manage situations that can turn overnight into either successes or failures.

*Madalin Necsutu*

## ***Russia's artificial energy crisis is a pressure mechanism through which Moscow is trying to destabilize Moldova***

***The Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Mr. Oleg Serebrian, gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter in which we talked about Russia's influence on the Transnistrian separatist region which it uses as a pressure point on the Chisinau authorities. We discussed a wide range of issues - from human rights and the release of detainees on the left bank of the Dniester, to the energy crisis artificially created by Russia, or Moscow's attempts to block Moldova's European path through the Transnistrian breakaway region. We invite you to read below the interview with the Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Oleg Serebrian:***



■ Mr. Serebrian, we are about to commemorate 34 years since the beginning of the bloody Dniester War and we have a new reality, but the same aggressor - Russia - with the same imperialist ambitions in the region. Have Moscow's interests changed today with regard to Transnistria and the problems that Russia is causing through this lever of influence on Chisinau?

■ The constitutional authorities are attentively monitoring the regional developments and their impact on the country's reintegration process. Despite geopolitical changes in recent years, Moscow continues to use the Transnistrian region as an instrument of political, economic and strategic influence over Chisinau. This influence is manifested by supporting the separatist regime in Tiraspol, maintaining Russian troops in the region despite international commitments, and using economic and energy levers to exert pressure on the Chisinau authorities.

The position of the Republic of Moldova remains firm: the peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian issue must be based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country. In this regard, our efforts are geared towards strengthening our dialogue with international partners, diversifying economic relations and ensuring a coherent approach, including in the light of our strategic objective of European integration.

### **Artificially created crisis**

■ How do you see the energy crisis artificially created by Russia regarding the Transnistrian region? Is it a measure through which Russia is trying to influence the parliamentary elections that will take place this year and thus Moldova's European path?

■ The artificial energy crisis imposed by Russia is a pressure mechanism through which Moscow is trying to destabilize the Republic of Moldova both economically and socially. Limiting access to energy sources or changing the conditions for the delivery of natural gas and therefore electricity is a strategy aimed at undermining our efforts to strengthen energy security and reduce our dependence on Russia.

This tactic is also used in an electoral context, aiming at fuelling social discontent and influencing public perception of the current government. However, the government in Chisinau is making considerable efforts to diversify energy sources by connecting to the European electricity grid, investing in alternative sources and strategic partnerships with states in the region, especially Romania. Our objective is to ensure the country's energy stability and reduce vulnerabilities related to dependence on Russia.

### **Opportunity turned down politically**

■ How do you assess the €60 million EU grant offer for the Transnistrian region, which was turned down in favour of an opaque loan for gas supplies that Russia is offering through a series of companies to the Transnistrian region?

■ The European Union's offer of EUR 60 million in the form of a grant represents a significant opportunity for the economic development of the Transnistrian region and for improving the living conditions of the population there. This financial support would have contributed to the democratic development of the region, thus promoting the sustainable economic development of the region.

The rejection of this aid, in favour of a mechanism to deliver gas through intermediary companies, reflects Tiraspol's economic and political dependence on Moscow. This decision was not taken, at this point in time, in the interests of the residents of the Transnistrian region, but rather to maintain Moscow's control over Tiraspol and to block initiatives that could bring the region closer to European standards. In this context, the Republic of Moldova remains open to working with the EU and other international partners to support the development of the Transnistrian region in a transparent and sustainable manner.

■ The EU also had a number of conditionalities for Tiraspol

**regarding this grant. Were they coordinated with Chisinau and why exactly do you think they were refused by Tiraspol?**

■ The European Union has set certain conditions for this grant, including financial transparency measures, compliance with European standards of governance and the promotion of human rights. These conditions have been coordinated with the authorities in Chisinau, which fully support the application of clear criteria for the use of external funds to ensure that they are allocated efficiently and for the citizens' benefit.

Tiraspol's refusal to accept this financial support demonstrates the lack of real autonomy in the decision-making process and the continuation of a policy of isolating the region from European initiatives. In reality, the current refusal of this grant is the result of direct influence from Moscow, which sees these conditions as a threat to its control over the region. The authorities in Chisinau will continue to work with international partners to find solutions to support the development of the region, without holding it captive to external interests.

### ***Fears of possible escalations***

■ **Is it in Russia's interest to try to escalate tensions between the two sides and do you expect to increase, by various means, the anxiety among the citizens of**

**the Transnistrian region against Chisinau?**

■ The Republic of Moldova remains vigilant against any attempt to escalate the situation in the Transnistrian region. Russia's attempts to incite anxiety among the population on the left bank of the Dniester are part of a broader strategy of hybrid influence used to undermine Chisinau's efforts to integrate into the European Union.

Through disinformation, economic pressure and manipulation of public perceptions, Moscow is trying to create a climate of uncertainty and fear. The authorities in Chisinau promote constructive dialog and policies that serve the interests of all citizens, regardless of which side of the Dniester they live on. Our aim is to strengthen stability and national security through a balanced approach and active communication with the people of the Transnistrian region.

■ **How do you see Tiraspol's response to the request of releasing political prisoners and could we witness in the near future releases of more such people?**

■ The situation of detainees in the Transnistrian region is a constant concern for the authorities in Chisinau and for the international partners concerned about respect for human rights. Any release of these people is a positive step, but it is essential that this is part of a sustainable

process of democratization in the region. Unfortunately, isolated releases are not a sustainable solution as long as the Tiraspol regime continues to hold people on political grounds. We will continue to insist on the release of all detainees on such grounds and will work with international organizations to monitor the human rights situation in the region. An open and transparent dialogue with the negotiating partners is essential to prevent further abuses and to ensure the protection of our citizens on both banks of the Dniester.

### ***Breaking the information bottleneck***

■ **Moldova's public TV station, as well as other TV channels, can now be seen on the left bank of the Dniester, even if most of them are pay-TV. Is this a step forward and is it possible to listen freely to Moldovan radio stations on the left bank of the Dniester?**

■ Access to alternative sources of information for the population in the Transnistrian region is an important step in combating disinformation and promoting democratic values. In an information climate dominated by propaganda and external influences, ensuring free access to independent media is essential for increasing the level of information among citizens.

The constitutional authorities in Chisinau are concerned about the situation of freedom of expression, as the press on

the right bank does not have unhindered access to the region. There are numerous cases where people have been persecuted and illegally imprisoned for simply expressing opinions that differ from those promoted by the Tiraspol regime.

Democratization of the region is a major objective, and it is closely linked to the existence of a free and impartial media that respects professional and ethical standards. At present, there is no investigative press in the region, and this information vacuum is conducive to manipulation and lack of transparency. It is essential for the press on the left bank of the Dniester to be registered in Chisinau and to operate within the legal framework of the constitutional authorities, thus providing the residents of the region with access to fair and objective sources of information.

■ **What has changed in recent months in the dialog with Tiraspol, and are the negotiations now being conducted from different positions between Tiraspol and Chisinau? Do you find a common denominator more quickly against the background of Moldova allowing the transportation of gas paid for by Russia by other routes than the previous ones?**

■ Dialogue with Tiraspol has fluctuated in recent months amid changes in the regional context and adjustments in Moldova's economic approaches. Chisinau maintains a pragmatic approach,

prioritizing the protection of citizens' interests and the reduction of dependencies that create vulnerabilities.

The energy aspect is a sensitive one in these negotiations, and any concession related to gas transportation must be carefully analyzed in order to avoid strengthening the self-proclaimed regime. In spite of the difficulties, the Republic of Moldova remains committed to dialog and to finding solutions to support the reintegration process in the long term.

### **Energy security**

■ **Will the construction of the Isaccea - Vulcanesti - Chisinau high-voltage line change the situation in terms of Moldova's energy security, which will no longer depend on the "control lever" that currently passes through the Moldres power plant in Cuciurgan? How important is it to speed up this project?**

■ The construction of the Isaccea - Vulcanesti - Chisinau high-voltage power line is one of the most important strategic projects for Moldova's energy security. This infrastructure will enable our country to connect directly to the European energy grid, thus reducing dependence on the Cuciurgan power plant, which is controlled by Inter RAO UES of the Russian Federation and supported by the Tiraspol regime.

Energy independence is essential for the economic and political stability of the Republic of

Moldova and accelerating this project is a national priority. Its completion will create opportunities to diversify energy sources, stabilize prices and provide consumers with greater energy security.

■ **How important is it to have a pro-European majority in Chisinau after this year's parliamentary elections to continue the European course? What would the hypothetical coming to power in Chisinau of a pro-Russian government mean in terms of security in the region, the Transnistrian issue and the economy of the war in Ukraine?**

■ Maintaining a pro-European majority in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova is a key element for further European integration and democratic reforms. A pro-European government ensures a clear direction for economic and political development, based on the values of the rule of law, transparency and cooperation with Western partners.

A possible change of political orientation in favour of a pro-Russian government could have serious consequences for national security, slowing down reforms, blocking the European path and exposing the country to increased geopolitical risks. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova needs stability and international support to protect its sovereignty and ensure a secure future for its citizens.

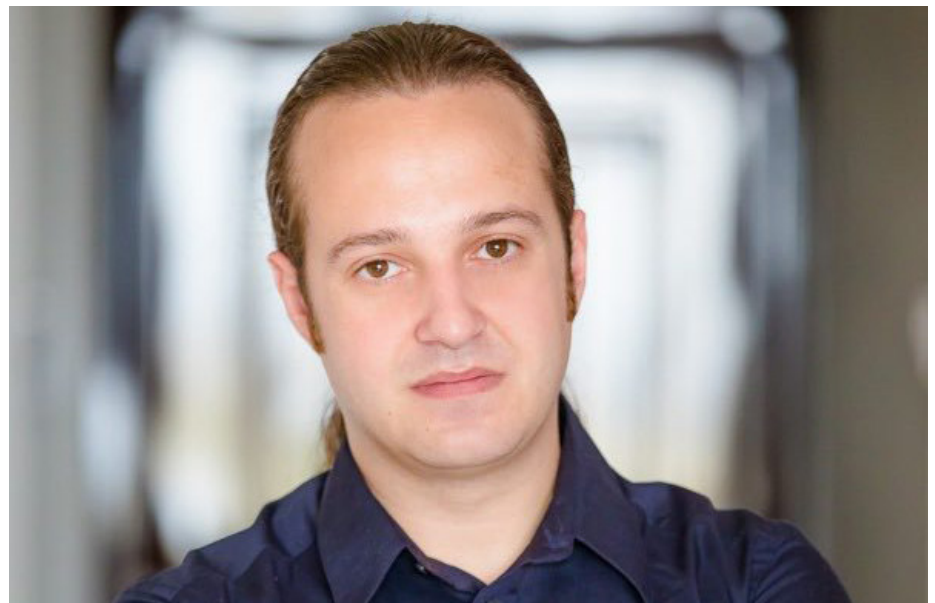
■ **Thank you!**

## Editorial

# How long can the Tiraspol regime survive in these uncertain times?

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

The war in Ukraine has changed the paradigm of the functioning of the Transnistrian separatist region some three years after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Time has begun to run in reverse and the days of this regime, as we have known it for more than three decades, are numbered. On the one hand, the pragmatism of the Transnistrian separatist leaders, represented by the Sheriff concern, tends towards a more transactional approach with Chisinau and even with the EU, but at the same time they have to be obedient to Moscow, which has illicitly enriched them over the last three decades. Maintaining the current status quo is the quintessence of Tiraspol's efforts, against the backdrop of an increasingly shaky position on the part of Russia, which is no longer as willing as before to support the very existence of this region with free gas. At the same time, the Chisinau authorities are gaining more and more leverage in direct negotiations with Tiraspol, and the EU's role is no longer just that of an unconditional sponsor in a direct or indirect form. The EU has shifted to a new paradigm in its relations with the Transnistrian region. Not only is it directly helping Chisinau with substantial resources, but it is also agreeing with the constitutional authorities the conditions that the Transnistrian



region should fulfil - from human rights to the breaking of the information bloc. All these conditions point in the direction of the gradual reintegration of the two banks of the Dniester. Ukraine, for its part, created the context for these new realities on 1 January 2025, by refusing to allow Russian gas to reach the region. The temporary compromise made by the Kiev authorities to allow the Hungarian company MET Group to bring gas paid for by a dubious and non-transparent loan to Transnistria via the Trans-Balkan pipeline is nothing more than a bargaining lever with the Russians. Even if we were to assume that MET Group or another company in cahoots with Russia will find the technical solutions to bring, for example, this gas through Romania, then Bucharest will most

likely have a say, or certain additional conditions, vis-à-vis Tiraspol. In other words, the Tiraspol regime, on current data, has its days numbered in the form we have known it for almost 35 years since the 1992 Dniester War.

### **What should Chisinau do?**

What is important now is for the authorities in Chisinau to move firmly, but without escalating and hysterizing the situation, so as not to delay the end of this Transnistrian charade with Moscow's puppets. The Republic of Moldova has a unique opportunity to put an end to this situation, but it is obvious that without Western partners, particularly the EU, this will not be achieved. From a strategic

point of view, the EU has, without any doubt, every interest in putting an end to this Russian outpost in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, Moscow has an interest in encouraging a natural situation of unrest on both banks of the Dniester in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in the autumn, which could eventually degrade into an armed conflict, which could even create the premises for Russia's military intervention, as in 1992.

### **Russia's manoeuvre**

Moscow wants to provoke, through the structures of force it controls in Tiraspol, such a crisis in order to create a *casus belli* against Chisinau under the pretext of defending its own citizens in Transnistria. In such a scenario, it is important for the Republic of Moldova to be very active on the Euro-Atlantic diplomatic scene and to become very vocal about its interests. It is essential that the Transnistrian file be taken even at the bottom of the page of any agreement between Washington and Moscow on the ceasefire in Ukraine. The Republic of Moldova cannot sit at the negotiating table, but it can become part of the 'menu', in the good sense of the word, on the side of the civilized and democratic world, after the new security lines in Europe have been drawn. The current leadership of the Republic of Moldova must take on an insanely courageous, even cheeky, role in 'forcibly including' the Transnistrian dossier on this menu at the negotiating table between the world powers.

The regime in Tiraspol, dominated by the Sheriff holding company and its discreet patrons Victor Gșan and Ilya Kazmalî, who use Vadim Krasnoselski as a political front to govern the region, is interested in an extension by any means, even by giving in to Chisinau.

As businessmen, they are pragmatic, transactional and willing to make concessions. However, interests at the top in Tiraspol are diverging because of the hard wing formed by Moscow loyalists who are the hardliners of an aggressive and uncompromising policy in favour of the EU and Chisinau. In this thicket of interests, Ukraine wants to push the situation so that Russia's proxies bring gas to Transnistria in as controlled a way as possible and leave as little leverage as possible for Russia in the whole gas supply saga. Chisinau has understood this game and there is certainly coordination on this file between Chisinau-Kiev-Bucharest-EU.

On a broader level, the next few weeks will be crucial after the Munich Security Conference and the meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, between the heads of US and Russian diplomacy. There, they discussed some of the conditions for a ceasefire and a realignment of the world order. The Transnistrian file was not discussed, which is why the Republic of Moldova must put itself in the most favourable position possible in the coming weeks. Chisinau needs to come up with a contingency plan for the reintegration of its secessionist region that is well thought out and financially backed by firm commitments from European partners.

### **Constant dialog**

On the other hand, the authorities in Chisinau must maintain a dialog with Tiraspol so that the situation does not escalate between the two sides, as Moscow wants. It is important that this conditionality is not just a sham. The release of some 'political prisoners' who were in fact drug traffickers seems once again to be a rather unserious measure on Tiraspol's part. Also, the fact that some stations on the right bank are now also seen in Transnistria was de facto a situation that was previously also allowed against payment by cable operators in the region. What is important is that they are somehow included in the "must carry" programme and can be watched free-to-air. In an impoverished region in the midst of a crisis, it is difficult to believe that too many people will pay extra to watch the channels on the right bank. As such, Chisinau needs to be alert to Tiraspol's smokescreens of goodwill and communicate them as such, without too much cosmeticization and the pomp of glorious successes. The Republic of Moldova has taken certain steps in the Transnistrian issue, but there is still a long way to go. There must be constant and combined pressure from Chisinau and the EU, because the levers and the balance of power have changed. Tiraspol, for its part, can no longer be as defiant as before. Its levers have been steadily diminishing in recent years, and Russia is not in the strongest position, as before, to dictate policy on both sides of the Dniester. Russia's main focus will be on what happens with Ukraine, and its interest in the breakaway region will be seen only as a transactional lever to negotiate with the West.

# People in the Transnistrian region should also be able to get information from alternative sources



**I**on Manole, the executive director of Promo-LEX, one of the non-governmental organizations most concerned with the Transnistrian file, gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter in which we discussed the about the stat of human rights in the Transnistrian region. We also talked about the degrading conditions in prisons on the left bank of the Dniester and the levers that Chisinau now has in the region. Last but not least, we discussed about the need for contingency plans for the reintegration of the country under the constitutional leadership in Chisinau. Please read the full interview below:

■ **Mr. Manole, how do you see the situation regarding political detainees in the Transnistrian region changing? Is Tiraspol more open in this respect?**

■ There is not much difference between the prisoners there, as they are all victims of legal

mechanisms or lack of legal mechanisms. All the judgments issued on that territory violate, in one way or another, the rights of the citizens there. It is because the procedural rights of those people are not respected, and also because there are no trials by recognized institutions.

Secondly, according to the rulings of the European Court, all judgments or all decisions that are made by this system are illegal. From this point of view, I would not make a big difference between the prisoners who are there. We are talking about a certain number of people who are in detention in the Transnistrian region.

■ **What do you think about the release of Anton Malyshev, who is accused of drug trafficking? And is there any chance that the persons who were imprisoned for criticizing the regime will indeed be released?**

■ Obviously, these people who have been critical of the Tiraspol regime should have priority for the Chisinau authorities and international organizations. No one should be punishable for their opinions, even in a regime or a territory uncontrolled by the constitutional authorities and unrecognized internationally.

Why should they have priority? We know only one person was released, but there are probably more. We also know about the possibility that other detainees have been released from there, but there is practically no information, because, as I was



saying, no one has access to that territory - neither at the stage of examining the facts by the institutions or bodies there, nor if people needed medical assistance. It happened that the detainees urgently needed medical aid, medicines, but they did not allow to either deliver the medicines or examine the detainees.

### **Lack of transparency and openness**

■ **Speaking of the conditions of detention, how many detainees are there in the Transnistrian region and what is the state in which they are being held? The authorities mentioned a number of around 2,000 people. Do you agree with that?**

■ Yes, according to the official figures that we know, there are around 1,900 to 2,000 people detained in prisons on the left bank of the Dniester. But what is noteworthy here is that the incarceration rate is the highest in Europe. It is about double the one on the right bank of the Dniester. The incarceration rate in the Transnistrian region is even higher than in the Russian Federation.

People are imprisoned for various offenses. In addition to this situation is the Tiraspol regime's refusal to allow free access to this territory for journalists who could shed light or for human rights defenders or lawyers to go to the courts there and monitor or at least try, even according to local procedures and laws, to

defend the people and victims in this territory. All this happens because the secessionist regime in Tiraspol does not allow free access to these professionals.

■ **Do you expect any changes in the access of journalists to this region, as this is one of Chisinau's conditions?**

■ I believe that Chisinau could have achieved more under these conditions at the beginning of 2025, but, unfortunately, it did not succeed. We do not know why it did not succeed. We hope to have explanations from the authorities, but I regret this situation.

Partial openness towards certain TV stations and their acceptance into the grid there is not enough in my view. I think that it would be better to have free access for journalists there, who could talk freely on the street with people, could ask them certain questions and take the pulse of society in the region. Our journalists could also take part in various activities or even broadcasts by television stations retransmitted in the area, so that people can get information from alternative sources. In this way, the population on the left bank of the Dniester would be able to find out other opinions about certain situations and not just information manipulated by the Tiraspol regime.

### **The need for greater involvement**

■ **How do you see the state's efforts in recent years to defend human rights in the Transnistrian**

**region? Is there more or less interest in this respect?**

■ The Moldovan authorities have made statements about prioritizing human rights in the region. In recent years, especially after February 2022, when the war against Ukraine started, the situation has become much more favourable for the constitutional authorities.

Judging by the declarations, we have achieved some results and I would say there is more interest now than previously. However, this is still below the level of expectations and needs of the population on the left bank of the Dniester.

■ **Why do you think the Transnistrian region did not accept a €60 million grant that came with light conditionality from the EU to buy gas, but preferred an opaque Russian loan about which we don't know too many details?**

■ With reference to the Transnistrian region, we are talking about two categories of actors there.

I believe that the population would have been grateful and would have accepted that help from the European Union, only the population there does not have much of a say.

At the same time, I tend to believe that the secessionist administration in Tiraspol cannot make independent decisions or cannot always make independent

decisions for the region or for the population there. I think the indications came from Moscow and they were not allowed to accept that help under any circumstances.

### **Stronger levers**

■ **In your opinion, does Chisinau currently have more leverage to condition Tiraspol, given that the right bank manages gas transportation to the left bank of the Dniester?**

■ Definitely yes. However, I think that Chisinau have not thought out, constructed and conveyed well the message on the left bank of the Dniester. I believe that the central authorities should have a channel through which to address the residents of the Transnistrian region and each time explain to them exactly what is happening, what they have prepared and why they have acted in a certain way or another. Or why they have not acted when the population had expectations.

When I refer to the population on the left bank of the Dniester, I believe that the messages should be addressed both to the residents of the territory

controlled by the Tiraspol administration and the population in the security zone. Because we have seen in certain localities how easily people can be manipulated and set up against the authorities.

### **Plans and costs for reintegration**

■ **In addition to human rights, freedom of expression and the release of political detainees, what other priorities do you think Chisinau should insist on in its relations with Tiraspol?**

■ We understand the concern of the authorities caused by certain risks that would arise when the Transnistrian region would somehow come out from under Moscow's wing and would return under Chisinau. In this case, obviously, there will be very high costs for Chisinau, and I think that this is the fear of certain actors in the Republic of Moldova.

■ **It is clear that the Republic of Moldova cannot bear these costs. Is now the right time to think about an economic plan for re-entry together with international partners?**

■ I believe that before involving partners, we need to know what we want. As long as the authorities do not have a strategic plan and do not work on one, do not involve the relevant stakeholders, it is complicated to ask or hope that someone, even our partners, who obviously want to help us, will do the job for us.

I believe that we, the society and the authorities, need to unite our efforts, to discuss each aspect in detail, to have a very clear vision of what we do, how we do it and come up with solutions for various scenarios.

For example, if we talk about the economy, we must also start from what happened with privatization or nationalization, or with the takeover of some enterprises on the left bank of the Dniester that are very important for the country's economy. All these issues need to be discussed, we need to weigh them up, analyse them and, why not, have a plan and a very clear understanding in society of what we are doing and under what conditions and how we act in certain situations.

■ **Thank you!**

# The energy crisis, a stage in the Kremlin's preparations for the parliamentary elections in Moldova



**Analysis by Natalia Stercul,  
director of the Foreign Policy Association (APE)**

It is no secret that energy blackmail is a powerful political tool used by Russia in its foreign policy. As the Republic of Moldova has pursued its pro-European path, it has increasingly confronted with this problem and had to look for compromise solutions. Russia's war against Ukraine has changed many things, including the attitude of the Moldovan authorities towards the energy issue. The search for alternative solutions and possibilities for diversifying energy resources was almost always hindered by the price policy, which imposed a financial burden hard to bear for Moldovan citizens. However, the authorities succeeded in transferring the entire fuel consumption of the right bank of the Dniester to European markets, while the Russian-controlled Transnistrian region remained dependent on the gas supplies from Gazprom, which it received free of charge. After the five-year transit contract between Russia's Gazprom and Naftogaz in Ukraine, a country in the midst of a war triggered by Russia, expired at the end of 2024, Russian gas supplies to Europe were stopped. Moscow has refused to provide alternative fuel supplies to Tiraspol, leading to an energy crisis artificially created by Russia.

## **Transnistria uses gas bought on the European market for the first time**

In the winter of 2025, the Transnistrian region faced for the first time a major energy crisis due to the cessation of gas supplies from Russia. Increased electricity consumption by the residents of the unrecognized region exceeded the production capacity of the power system, leading to massive power outages. There were problems heating homes and supplying hot water. Almost all industrial enterprises suspended their operations, the food industry had to operate at night and schools were forced to extend their winter vacation. Electricity was insufficient and the Russian-induced energy crisis brought Transnistria to the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe. However, the accusations from the separatist authorities were not directed against Russia, which has left the region in dire straits, but against Chisinau and Kiev.

In view of the gravity of the situation, the European Union announced at the end of January €64 million in aid for Moldova to overcome the energy crisis. Of this amount, €30 million is earmarked for the purchase of gas and electricity for both banks of the Dniester, of which €20 million for gas for Transnistria and €10 million for

electricity for the right bank. The remaining €34 million will be used for budget support. Thus, practically half of the amount is earmarked for the purchase of gas for Transnistria on European markets and for the production of electricity at the Moldovan Thermolectric Power Plant for both banks of the Dniester. Starting February 1, "Moldovagaz" launched fuel deliveries to the Transnistrian region. Thus, for the first time in the last three decades, Transnistria, which had depended exclusively on free Russian gas, started using gas purchased on the European market.

Trying to find a solution to the current crisis, the Moldovan government has negotiated with the EU a grant to overcome the energy crisis. Thus, since February, Transnistria has been receiving gas purchased with European funds on the European market. Thanks to the support of European partners and their willingness to help, Chisinau has managed to find an alternative solution. This has enabled the resumption of electricity generation for both banks of the Dniester and the restoration of energy and heating for Transnistria's residents. However, hopes persist in the Transnistrian region that supplies of free Russian gas will resume.

### ***Moscow's electoral manoeuvre***

Against the backdrop of the energy crisis, political analysts and experts have started to consider the possibilities of reintegration and return of the Transnistrian region into the legal framework of the

Republic of Moldova. However, most discussions have led to the conclusion that neither politically nor economically, the necessary preparations for such a step are yet in place. Moreover, on the threshold of parliamentary elections, such a process is practically impossible. However, the recognition by the Transnistrian side that it cannot cope without external help could, in the future, provide a basis for mutual agreements on reintegration.

The energy crisis, artificially provoked by Moscow, can be seen as one of the stages in the Kremlin's preparations for the parliamentary elections due this year in Moldova. The experience of the presidential elections and the referendum in the fall of 2024 demonstrated that Moldova remains extremely vulnerable to Russia's levers of influence and its attempts to undermine democratic and electoral processes and the pro-European direction of the Republic of Moldova. On the eve of the parliamentary elections in Moldova, Moscow intensified its efforts to ensure the victory of pro-Russian forces. For the current pro-European government, this is a serious challenge and a clear signal that it must act pre-emptively. The energy crisis is highly likely to affect the ruling party's electoral chances, despite the efforts of the authorities.

### ***Pro-Russian forces prepare for revenge***

The negotiations that started between the US and Russia on Ukraine without the participation of Ukraine and its European allies,

together with the fact that Donald Trump did not agree to the definition of Russia as an aggressor in the resolution that G7 leaders were to approve before the third anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as the unprecedented criticism of US President Volodimir Zelensky – accused of dictatorial aspirations, while Vladimir Putin was not subject to the same criticism – indicate a shift in the US foreign policy. It is safe to say that a geopolitical reconfiguration has begun that will affect both Ukraine and Moldova.

The results of the upcoming parliamentary elections will be a decisive moment. Russia's main objective is to undermine Moldova's pro-European course. We are already seeing the actions of pro-Russian forces intensifying. The creation of the opposition electoral bloc 'Alternativa', with the participation of former presidential candidate Alexandr Stoianoglo; the protests organized by former president and leader of the Party of Socialists, Igor Dodon, against the current government; Irina Vlah's proposals for the signing of a pact between opposition forces against PAS; the hardening of Russian rhetoric towards Moldova; the artificial exacerbation of the situation in order to destabilize and divide society – all this is only the beginning. This year's parliamentary elections in Moldova will take place in an extremely difficult context. It is clear that the current composition of the Parliament will not remain the same, but the essential question is whether a revival of pro-Russian forces in Moldova is possible. This question will be defining for the European future of our country.

# The government was obliged to ensure that the regime in Tiraspol is put in a position to accept market realities

**S**tefan Gligor, leader of the Party of Change, which is part of the political bloc "Together", spoke in an interview for the foreign policy newsletter about how he sees the resolution of the energy crisis created by Russia in the Transnistrian region. We talked about the effectiveness of the measures taken by the current government to prepare for the cold season, but also about the conditionality that Chisinau could have imposed on Tiraspol. We invite you to read the full interview with the leader of the Party of Change about the Transnistrian regime and Chisinau's moves below:

■ How do you see the Chisinau authorities' handling of the situation regarding gas supplies to the Transnistrian region?

■ I believe that this problem has two compartments. Namely the gas compartment, more precisely the provision of the Republic of Moldova with the necessary volumes of natural gas. This is the big chapter which has also had a lesson to learn from the past, from the time when Andrei Spanu was Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development.

Unfortunately, in 2024, we have not learned the lessons of the past. Moldovan companies, especially Energocom and Moldovagaz, did not buy the necessary gas in time for the 2024-2025 heating season, and this



led to a 3.74 lei per cubic meter of gas, which impoverished our population by more than 80 million euros. This was the first mistake and the biggest failure in ensuring Moldova's energy security.

If we had bought this gas in February 2024, when the quotations were 22, 24, 28 euros per megawatt and not 42 or 56 euros per megawatt hour, this would have allowed us to actually cheapen the gas which is a component of chapter 2 of energy security, namely electricity.

## **Solutions and scenarios**

■ What was done wrong from your perspective by the authorities?

■ We cogenerate 30-40 percent of the energy we need through CETs, and the cost of gas is a component part of electricity. If natural gas was 10-12 lei in the bill, but not at around 17 lei, then the final cost of the end product for consumers wouldn't be 4.10 lei/kWh, but significantly lower.

If the government had vision and systemic approach, they would have rented or bought some mobile gas turbines in advance. These are available on the international market in multiple options. There are 30 and 50 megawatt turbines. These turbines could be loaded in 5-7 truckloads, then brought in and mounted on a prepared concrete platform.

For example, the energy source three, which was never built in the end, with a production capacity of 55 megawatts by burning internal gas using internal gas engines, was to be created on the territory of CET 1.

If we already knew about two years in advance that from 1 January 2025, Ukraine would no longer allow us to transit gas to the Transnistrian region to produce that electricity at about 67 dollars per megawatt, why did the Moldovan government not anticipate this crisis and ensure the increase in production capacity?

These are the two chapters preceding this unprecedented crisis. We have never paid as much for electricity as we do today. The state subsidizes only a part of the real consumption, up to 110 kilowatts, which again impoverishes the population by probably more than EUR 100 million.

Against this background, we arrive at the situation created in the Transnistrian region. In relation to the Transnistrian region, we had only one option, and the "Together" bloc has communicated publicly on several occasions. We have simply said that the economy of the right bank provides for its needs by purchasing gas and electricity on the free market, except for the share that we cogenerate.

The left bank has to do the same. Does anyone think that for the Metallurgical Plant or the Cement Plant, both in Ribnitsa, this economic shock is a big problem? They have been monetizing two billion cubic meters of gas annually for over two decades and enriching Russian oligarchs,

Transnistrian oligarchs from Sheriff, and their politicians who keep our citizens in cold and fear, with miserable salaries, and have been stealing from them for over three decades.

### ***Non-transparent schemes for gas supplies***

#### **■ What should the current government have done about the energy crisis created by Russia for the Transnistrian region?**

■ The Recean government had only one obligation – with dignity and vision, to deal with this unconstitutional and illegal regime in Tiraspol, which is making a mockery of human rights and basic norms of decency.

The government should have been concerned and was obliged to ensure that this regime is treated properly and is put in a position to accept market realities. Today it appears that the economic shock is being received by the right bank, while the left bank continues to benefit, through the care and dedication of the Moldovan Government, from Russian gas which has been delivered through the most obscure schemes since 1992.

The gas is paid for by some company in Dubai, and it is unclear where the money comes from on this company's accounts. This gas is bought through a well-known Hungarian company (MET Group) which is part of a large European holding company.

Also, my sources in the Transnistrian region tell me that out of these 3.1 million cubic meters of gas purchased in an obscure way, only about 1 to 1.2

million cubic meters of gas would be used to meet the needs of individuals and public institutions. The other around two million cubic meters of gas coming daily into the region would be used by local industry, including for the production of electricity that is delivered into the system for the benefit of offshore companies. Subsequently, this electricity is monetized by these third-party companies to an end consumer who claims to be the consumer in the Republic of Moldova.

I would like much more clarity, because 3.2 million cubic meters per day is a sufficient quantity for the functioning of the entire Transnistrian economy. Since the Rabnița Metallurgical Plant (MMZ) has not yet started up its smelting plant, the question is what is to be done with this gas. I do not expect any answer to this question from the Recean government.

### ***Levers of influence***

#### **■ Is now the right time for the authorities in Chisinau to put more conditions on the separatist regime there? Does it have more leverage? Does it have measures whereby it could impose more conditionality?**

■ We currently have all possible levers. If the Republic of Moldova does not allow the transit of this gas through its territory to the Transnistrian region, the Transnistrian region will have no gas or electricity.

We have absolute control over this region, we just lack courage, dignity and vision. We have politicians who prefer to tell us about the importance

of saving the citizens on the left bank of the Dniester River under the guise of peace and security, who should and could have been saved with EU money, money which the EU has given us with great wisdom and generosity. It is just that the government has preferred to go along with a PAS solution silently accepted by President Maia Sandu, which is a lie concocted to ensure alleged peace and security.

I do not believe any of these stories. We had the European money and we were publicly informed by Prime Minister Recean and his spokesperson and other officials who made a big PR campaign. They said that the EU had finally saved the Transnistrian region, not the Russian Federation. But, we ended up seeing Vadim Krasnoselski issuing statements praising Vladimir Putin.

This situation is nothing but the result of the behaviour of the government of the Republic of Moldova, which did not have the courage and discipline to protect the national interest of the Republic of Moldova. This is how we at the "Together" Bloc understand the situation.

If the EU money was not promised and did not exist, could this scheme

of gas deliveries via Dubai be justified at all? Even without the EU money, the Transnistrian regime had a viable solution and the only correct one, in fact. It was able to buy gas, as it has been buying it for three days in a row, on the stock exchange, with the help of Moldovagaz, and deliver it to the left bank of the Dniester by introducing real tariffs on the market for industry and citizens.

The citizens on the left bank of the Dniester obviously had to benefit from a lower tariff, and this tariff had to be subsidized from the budget of the Republic of Moldova in the same way as citizens on the right bank are subsidized, through social assistance, on their bills.

### **Different visions**

■ **What would you change as an opposition party in your approach to the Transnistrian file at this point? What could have been done better?**

■ We would have opted for an end to this shameful scheme of delivering gas for obscure money from the United Arab Emirates. We would have insisted on the left bank of the Dniester to accept EU aid and we would have insisted on new electricity and gas tariffs.

We would have thought about providing a social protection regime for the citizens on the left bank of the Dniester in order to alleviate the economic shock and we would have stood by our citizens in this very difficult energy crisis. At the same time, the regime on the left bank of the Dniester, in order to benefit from these facilities from the EU and price subsidization, would have been obliged to release political prisoners, remove internal checkpoints on the administrative border.

We would have pushed Tiraspol to take concrete steps to democratize the region by providing access to all free media in the Republic of Moldova, not just Moldova 1, which is now on the 47<sup>th</sup> position in the grid. We would have also insisted on the aspects of common sense and appropriate behaviour required in terms of reintegration strategies and policies.

The Moldovan government has in fact surrendered to the Transnistrian regime. This is what citizens have to understand from the current situation.

■ **Thank you!**

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