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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

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



On 15 November, the Government of Chisinau approved the signing of the Loan Agreement with the EU on macro-financial assistance. The funding programme includes the allocation of €100 million Euros, of which €60 million Euros as a loan and €40 million Euros - in the form of a grant. The credit will be granted for a maximum of 15 years. A government statement says disbursements will be made in 2018 in three equal instalments, depending on the progress made in the implementation of the 28 EU conditionality. These relate to public governance, fighting corruption, energy sector reforms, financial sector governance, improving the business environment.



EBRD's Regional Director for Southeast Europe, Francis Malige, welcomed the adoption by the Moldovan Parliament of a series of legislative acts aimed at improving the financial and banking legislation and attracting foreign investment in the sector. During a meeting with the Speaker of Parliament, Andrian Candu, the official appreciated that the Romanian "Transilvania" Bank intends to buy a block of shares in Victoriabank's share capital. It is for the first time since 2007 that a foreign bank investor enters the Moldovan market the "Transilvania" Bank and EBRD respectively will jointly hold the majority stake in the "Victoriabank".



The road bridge over the Nistru between the localities of Gura Băcului - Bacioc was reopened on Saturday, November 18, and the ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Pavel Filip and the Transnistrian leader Vadim Krasnoselski. The bridge was destroyed during the 1992 armed conflict and restored from European funds in the early 2000s. It was not used because of the political disagreements between Chisinau and Tiraspol. A press release of the Moldovan delegation to the Joint Control Commission suggests, however, that the disputes around the activity of control posts near the bridge continue.



The deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Gheorghe Balan, announced that the next round of "5 + 2" negotiations will take place in Vienna, on 26-28 November. The agenda will include issues related to the access to agricultural land, the situation of Latin-script schools, the circulation of registered vehicles in the Transnistrian region, etc. The negotiations in the "5 + 2" format have not been held for more than a year.



The Government of Chisinau will present in the near future a vision on the special status for Transnistria in the reintegrated Republic of Moldova. The document is now in the process of consultation with the civil society, Prime Minister Pavel Filip said during a meeting with Wolf Dietrich Heim, the special representative of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship in the Transnistrian settlement.



The EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Johannes Hahn, said he is working on a project to reduce the roaming tariffs between the EU countries and Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, so they can be cancelled later. Hahn did not give a date when he thinks that the roaming tariffs could be reduced and eventually cancelled, but he said he is involved in this project. The roaming tariffs have been cancelled in the European Union countries this year. According to a draft outline to be adopted on 24 November at the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels by 2020, the EU countries will focus on supporting Eastern Partnership countries to harmonize their allocation and roaming prices".

Johannes Hahn: Currently the openness for further extension in the EU is not very high, but I'm pretty sure this can be changed



The European Parliament adopted recently a series of recommendations addressed to the other EU institutions- the Commission and the Council -on the forthcoming Eastern Partnership Summit, calling for closer relations between the member countries and

especially Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. Parliament also proposes setting up a trust fund that would attract private and public investment in the social and economic infrastructure of the three countries. Parliament also proposes that the Eastern Partnership

countries that have “made substantial progress” on the reforms required by the European Union to be given the opportunity to join the customs union or the energy union. Parliament’s statement also calls for “maintaining pressure on Russia to resolve conflicts in the eastern neighbourhood of the European Union.” The Eastern Partnership Summit will take place on November 24 in Brussels.

On the eve of this summit, a series of preparation events took place, including the Business Forum and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Summit, which took place in Tallinn, Estonia, the country holding the EU presidency by the end of this year.

In a discussion with a small group of journalists about these events, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement, Johannes Hahn, highlighted some of the EU’s most important priorities with regard to the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood.

■ **Johannes Hahn:** For 2020 we have identified twenty key deliverables along four priority areas on which we have already agreed in Riga. One is economic development and market opportunities, the second is connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change, the third- strengthening the institutions and good governance, and the fourth is mobility and people-to-people contacts. On top of these, we have three cross-cutting deliverables- civil society, gender equality and non-discrimination, and of course, strategic communication, especially

the support to the independent media.

The issue now is that the Summit in Brussels will allow us to look into the different milestones which are already outlined for the twenty deliverables. The first priority area- the economic development and market opportunities- is about facilitating the access of companies to finance, also fostering the harmonization of digital markets. In particular, we have countries with Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements and the companies in these countries are accommodating with the challenges and standards that we have in the EU and which is necessary to comply with in order to enter the European market.

“It’s about exporting stability from the European Union in order not to import instability”

Maybe it’s important at this moment to give a little bit of a general view of what we are doing. I’m always saying it’s about exporting stability from the European Union in order not to import instability and our aim is to reduce the gap in the welfare and living conditions between the Union and the neighbouring countries. This means we have to invest in the democratic development, rule of law, fight against corruption, transparency, independent judiciary and in the increase in the economic attractiveness in order to attract foreign investors.

I would like to highlight eight deliverables which, I think, are of particular importance and have definitely the most meaningful

impact on the people’s daily life and also represent cooperation across the priority areas which I have already mentioned that we have agreed upon in Riga.

“We agreed at the level of transport ministers from the EU but also from the neighbouring countries to extend the Trans European transport network by 2030”

The priority area of connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change is about extending the core twenty networks by 2030. I think it was already last year that we agreed at the level of transport ministers from the EU but also from the neighbouring countries to extend the Trans European transport network, which consists of highways, railways, ports and airports, to our neighbouring countries. We should achieve this by 2030. It’s a huge project but if we manage to really implement it by 2030, it will have a huge impact on the cooperation and co-existence between the Union and the neighbouring countries.

A second issue is increasing energy efficiency of partner countries. One should not underestimate the effectiveness of the energy efficiency measures which can dramatically reduce the energy bills of the households, in particular of those with bad living conditions. Thermic insulation of houses is one issue, metric measurement is another thing where you can identify the consumption of the households, houses and of whole districts. Improving the energy efficiency and saving energy has an impact on every

individual and every household, but it also can reduce the dependence of our neighbouring countries on energy supplier, meaning the neighbour of our neighbours. This creates more political independence and less vulnerability.

Third is the digital package which is about cheap and more equal access to the digital world. It's about furthering investment in infrastructure, but it's also about an issue which has been discussed several times and this is reducing roaming tariffs among partner countries. And the first step towards a Roaming Agreement with the European Union is not an easy task to achieve, because here we will have to work together with companies. The other thing which I have already mentioned is supporting loans to SMEs in local currency. It sounds very technical but it is of big relevance if you are able to provide loans in local currency for the micro, small and medium sized companies as they usually account for 99 percent of a national economy and they are not used to work with foreign currency. So this can have a big positive impact.

Another issue is increasing trade opportunities across partner countries. This is a new focus on the inter-regional cooperation, improving business-to-business cooperation, people-to-people mobility. We believe this is an area we should pay particular attention.

“There is need for a strong, vibrant, experienced and skilled civil society. The young people should not only be able to travel but also to study abroad.”

Another key deliverable is better governance by involving civil society enhancing accountability and transparency in partner countries and this can only be achieved through a strong, vibrant, experienced and skilled civil society.

Another deliverable is youth and education package. I think it's important to increase significantly the funding for young people allowing them not only to travel but also to study abroad. So we will increase the number of Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes' scholarships, but of course with the aim that the young people study abroad and gain experience, but then come back home, contributing to the further development of their countries. And of course, there should also be a new approach on communication. This is where we try to work on tangible results, which are visible, and where people see the impact of this engagement.

“Currently the openness for further extension in the EU is not very high, but I'm pretty sure this can be changed.”

And now, anticipating the question of the European perspective of the neighbouring countries, one has to understand that the EU faced some challenges in the last couple of years. One should not underestimate that we had a big enlargement in 2004 when the EU increased from 15 to 25 members and in 2007 we had another enlargement wave with Bulgaria and Romania. In 2015- Croatia joined the EU. Now we are 28 and only 20 years ago

we were only 12 members in the EU. With 12 countries, the EU was more homogenous, while now it is more heterogeneous. The Union managed to integrate them perfectly and these efforts were interrupted by the financial-economic crisis and later on by the migration waves. Therefore, it is important for the Union to consolidate itself internally, which is why one has to understand that currently the openness for further extension is not very high. But I'm pretty sure this can be changed and our people will feel that new members are new assets. Therefore we have to work on the development in our neighbourhood- to provide and to create structures and conditions for the EU to accept new partners for the future.

My advice to our neighbouring countries is to focus on these deliverables and concrete issues in order to improve the whole situation and to prepare the ground for possible further steps in the future. We are all now advised to have a step-by-step approach and it's also about the expectations' management. People thinking in short-term time frames- politicians are usually elected for four to five years if there are no snap elections- and many of these ideas and inspirations cannot be fulfilled within this short and medium term timeframe. And in order to manage all those expectations, I think that those who are in charge and have responsibilities should promise only what they can fulfil during their term in office.

“Some time ago, the Republic of Moldova was the success story of the Eastern Partnership. What happened that it is no longer, I would be more than happy to learn about it.”

What happened in Moldova, I would be more than happy to learn about it, because for me, out of the blue, there was that turmoil in 2015, where we were confronted with the situation of having more than 5 prime ministers in one year. I have met three of them, I've heard one only on the phone and one of them I have neither met nor spoken with on the phone. And if you have five different prime-ministers and five different governments this is not conducive to progress and reforms. Like many others I was happy to see that in 2017 the government came into office and we have agreed immediately on the road map of activities and reforms and they tried to really implement them. Today we are facing a situation where there is an elected president who is apparently in tough opposition with the government which is again not conducive to the development of the country. So the main authorities of the state are not pulling the same string but once again we feel obliged to support citizens, the ordinary people.

“We have learned our lesson- we will support the Republic of Moldova so that it is never perceived as if we are backing the government, because we are backing the citizens.”

I'm always saying that I'm a privileged man as I was born in freedom and in a country with democracy. I had every opportunity to travel, to learn, and to say what I think without any restrictions. But if I had been born 60 km to the East, the situation would have been different. I'm from Vienna. I personally see it as a moral obligation to help everyone to improve his/ her living conditions. I think everyone has the right to it and this is our task and my understanding why I'm doing many things. Therefore, helping the citizens in Moldova cannot be done without being in cooperation with the Government. We need the Government. But the character and the way we support the country, as we have also learned our lesson, will be in a way that people understand and feel we are doing something and why we are doing it, so that it is never perceived as if we are backing the government, because we are backing the citizens. And we try to help them. If you invest in infrastructure- waste plants' equipment, this is a contribution to improving the hygiene standards. If we finance interconnectors, it's about access to other energy supplier which will hopefully reduce not only the political vulnerability of the country, but also the electricity prices, if there is more competition. And this is going to have an impact on the citizens. To build roads is another issue, but also to improve the judiciary system should definitely help. Therefore we are trying to steer a way forward where we are working and cooperating with the government, but always in

the interest of people, from our point of view. But I accept that we have to take care of the European taxpayers' money. We cannot give money without any conditions which have to be fulfilled.

“What will the EU do about the 100 million euros assistance promised to the Republic of Moldova?”

So what you are asking me is two things- one is macro-financial assistance and another, which you haven't asked me about but that what I would like to address, is budgetary support. Because budgetary support is also important for the country and here is one example – we have agreed to provide budgetary support in five areas. Reforms in four areas have been implemented in a proper way and in accordance with what we have more or less agreed. For that we will provide budgetary support. But the fifth area was about the judiciary reform where there was no progress and therefore we cannot give money, but we are ready to do it if there is real reform and progress. And with the macro-financial assistance we have to see how the overall package concerning the electoral law looks like, because there is the Recommendation of the Venice Commission which is not really respected by the government and the ruling party. The latter adopted a law and are now adopting the secondary legislation. After an overall assessment we will take our decision, but be reassured it should not be at the cost of citizens.

Cecilia Malmstrom: There is a lot of untapped potential in the application of the Free Trade Agreement

The European Trade Commissioner, Cecilia Malmstrom, also sent a series of messages to the Moldovan authorities on the occasion of an official visit to Chisinau. The visit aimed to assess the progress made on the free trade area with the EU three years after the signing of the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Agreement. Cecilia Malmstrom welcomed the increase in trade between the Republic of Moldova and the EU, but did not avoid talking about the problems that exist in the Republic of Moldova - justice and fighting corruption- important elements both for the democratic climate and for attracting investments.

Prime Minister Pavel Filip stated in this context that Moldova's exports to the EU reached 64 percent and imports - 50 percent, the number of companies involved in the EU trade is increasing as well as the diversification of exported products. Chisinau has called for the increase in quotas for table grapes, plums and cherries and the modification of export conditions for wheat, barley, corn and sugar, but also for the opening of the European market for Moldovan products of animal origin.

A press release by the EU Delegation in Chisinau announces that Moldovan exports to the EU have increased by more than 15% since the provisional entry into force of the Free Trade Agreement in September 2014. Producers of preserved juices, fruit and vegetables have increased their exports by 25% and the volume of Moldovan wines exported to the EU practically doubled (+ 96%) since the entry into force of the Free Trade Area.

■ **Cecilia Malmstrom:** The relations between the EU and Moldova are strong and the trade relations are very strong. We have seen that the DCFTA



has been good for Moldova- trade has increased by 15% compare to 2015. We have registered benefits of the DCFTA, giving Moldova preferential access to the big EU market-the largest market of the world- meaning free trade, less red tape, fair competition, opportunities for service providers, investment and sourcing opportunities. It also provides stable and predictable rules for the business, especially for the small and medium size companies. Moldovan companies - producers of juice and conserved fruit and vegetables- have benefited from this, boosting their trade by more than 25%. Regarding the alcoholic beverages, especially wine, the exports have doubled which is good news also for the European consumers.

So there have been a lot of advantages that we have already seen but we have discussed how to benefit more from the DCFTA possibilities as there is a lot of untapped potential here.

There is still need for legislation and implementation of reforms in Moldova- there are still technical and customs barriers, plant and animal hygiene norms that have to be developed. We have talked also about the food safety reforms that need to be properly implemented so that the exporters can have access to the European market.

We have discussed how to improve the business climate in general – it is important to defend the rule of law, to make sure that there are predictable and transparent rules so that the investors feel it is safe to invest in Moldova, therefore the fight against corruption is very important.

I've had meetings with the business community and civil society and their contribution to the debate is very important to put pressure on the government and to give ideas to the government as how to put the agreement in practice.

And I will launch an event of a new EU project with the aim to better communicate to the Moldovan business community how they can use the benefits of the DCFTA, make it easier for the small companies to have an overview of the new rules and possibilities. So this will be a communication project in certain sectors which will hopefully facilitate and encourage even more the business to dare export on the European market.

Cooperation between the EU and Moldova is getting stronger and the EU will continue to support Moldova on the path towards reforms.

Stanislav Secrieru: Is the Transnistrian conflict an immediate military threat to the Republic of Moldova?



In an analysis presented in Brussels, Stanislav Secrieru, expert at the European Institute for Security Studies in Paris, highlights the security threats posed by the existence of a pro-Russian separatist regime in Transnistria for both the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. He argues that while there exists a potential direct military threat, it is not immediate.

■ **Stanislav Secrieru:** There exists a potential direct military threat, but my argument is that it is not immediate. And I base my argument on several factors.

The first factor is that yes, the so-called military forces in Transnistria together with the forces of the Russian Federation, represent a real threat. Supply with equipment is at

a high level, the exercises are much more frequent than in the Republic of Moldova. And the very presence of some 2000 well-trained Russian soldiers can make a big difference. We saw it in Ukraine in 2014 that Russia did not need a substantial military presence to destabilize the eastern regions. So the separatist forces and the Russian Federation are a potential threat.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that the Moldovan authorities did not take seriously this potential military threat. With a defence budget of 0.3-0.5 percent of GDP you cannot talk about a real national security policy. Neither the number of exercises nor the number of participating troops are satisfactory. On the one hand, Transnistria is much better prepared, but on the other hand, Moldova

neglected investments in national defense to cope with an unanticipated escalation of the conflict

Though it is a potential threat, there are two reasons why I believe there is no immediate military threat. The first argument is that Russia is much more focused now on Ukraine than Moldova. The Transnistrian territory served as a basis for the preparation of destabilizing actions in the Odessa region and for the recruitment of conflict fighters in Donbas. At the same time, the mere presence of the Russian military forces Ukraine to maintain a military contingent near Transnistria. Thus, Russia manages to distract some of the troops from the Donbas front.

There is need for a clarification here. Transnistria may become an immediate military threat if Russia's strategy is successful in Ukraine. When the control of the Kiev authorities over the Odessa region becomes questionable, or the Donbas front line moves again, the military threat to the Republic of Moldova will become imminent.

Another reason, I think, there is no immediate military threat for Moldova is that Russia is trying to realize its agenda in the Republic of Moldova politically and not militarily. The political support of the Party of Socialists and of the President of the Republic of Moldova by Russia partly confirms this hypothesis. For example, if we are to take the statistics

of President Putin's meetings with the presidents and prime ministers of other states, you will find that President Dodon is most often received the leader in the Russian Federation. Probably by 2018 Russia's strategy, which is less expensive than the military strategies, is to influence the agenda of the Republic of Moldova in a non-military way.

If the Transnistrian conflict does not represent an immediate military threat, then what kind of threats is it bringing?

■ **Stanislav Secieru:** If we look at the security not only militarily but in a broader sense, we can see that Transnistria emanates other threats. For example, the Cobasna depot, where 20,000 tons of Russian ammunition are stored. Sometimes ammunition is dangerous even when the owner doesn't want to use it. Even the strictest security measures cannot rule out an explosion. And there are cases when ammunition depots exploded - there were cases at a military base in Russia and more recently, at a military base in Abkhazia. As a rule, such accidents lead to death, injuries and substantial material damage. In the event of an explosion in Cobasna, I think, the effects will be devastating for the environment, but also for the civil population in the region.

Secondly, the Transnistrian conflict has had negative effects on energy security. The Republic of Moldova did little to diversify the sources of electricity and natural gas imports. The gas pipeline crosses Transnistria and the Republic of Moldova continues to depend too much on the electricity supplied from the left bank of the Nistru. Politically motivated

disconnections have taken place in the past. So there is no guarantee that they will not happen again.

In addition, electricity import schemes have contributed to corrupting the political factor in Chisinau which is not rushing to promote interconnection projects with Romania. The best comparison is non-transparent schemes for natural gas imports from the Russian Federation to Ukraine until 2014 and the corruption of the political class in Kiev. The proportions of the generated rent are incomparably small, but the impact on the economic development of the Republic of Moldova is significant.

There exist also a series of non-conventional threats. As a rule, those who have problems with the law in Chisinau are trying to escape criminal responsibility by moving to Transnistria or by transiting through Transnistria to Ukraine. There are also cases when those who intend committing serious crimes in the Republic of Moldova use Transnistria as a transit area. There are also cases when citizens of other states find refuge in Transnistria. For example, the media reported that the former police commissioner from Odessa, after the events of May 2014, found refuge in Transnistria in order to escape the criminal investigation. So, practically, it is an area where those who have committed crimes can withdraw.

Another threat lies in the exercise of the vote and is an indicator of the state of democracy in the Republic of Moldova. The non-transparent participation of Transnistrian voters in the last presidential election and probably their future use is going to distort the democratic process in the Republic of Moldova.

What is the EU doing in order to minimize the threats coming from Transnistria?

■ **Stanislav Secieru:** The EU is co-financing the interconnections of the electricity and gas import networks from the European market from Romania.

EUBAM mission is going to be rethought. Its mandate will be prolonged until 2020, but it will be reduced and concentrated on the Transnistrian border section between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, with three main objectives - assistance in creating joint check points between Ukraine and Moldova, combating cross-border crime and implementing the DFCTA in Transnistria.

Another instrument by which the EU is trying to contribute to the correctness of the future democratic exercise in the Republic of Moldova is the use of conditionalities such as the rule of law and not just economic conditionalities for the granting of macro-financial assistance. Actually, it is for the first time that the EU uses democratic conditionalities for providing macro-financial assistance. So far emphasis has been put only on the economic conditions.

The EU can do many good things to neutralize the problems caused by the Transnistrian conflict, but the responsibility for what is happening in the Republic of Moldova lies with the Government and the society as a whole. The EU can provide funding for gas and electricity interconnections, but if there is no political will to modernize and implement the energy regulatory framework, the EU's willingness to help will not be capitalised. The EU can only stimulate,



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but the last word belongs to Chisinau. This is the difference between the EU and Russia in addressing relations with the Republic of Moldova. In relation to the EU, Chisinau determines freely the depth and intensity of relations. The EU enjoys the same freedom to say yes or no. In relations with Russia, Chisinau does not enjoy the freedom of choice.

How dangerous is the Russian ammunition stored in Transnistria?

■ **Stanislav Secieru:** Much of the ammunition is very old and it should be used locally without being withdrawn. The process of loading ammunition older than 40 years is very dangerous. There is now a debate between the experts as to whether the ammunition should be evacuated or destroyed on the spot in order to minimize the risks. But surely the subject of potential danger for the population and the environment must be raised and addressed in international forums. This issue must also be raised during the consultations with the EU, but also in the discussions with the OSCE in order to develop an international assistance programme for securing deposits and the way this ammunition is stored.

However, I think, there is little chance that this will happen, because for Russia, the ammunition in Transnistria means to legitimize its long military presence. Russia invokes the necessity of presence by guarding the depots. At the same time, the evacuation or liquidation of ammunition will be used as an exchange currency to obtain significant concessions from Chisinau. As long as the Republic of Moldova is not willing to make satisfactory

concessions for Russia, the munitions will remain in Transnistria. With every passing year the danger of obsolete ammunition is going to increase.

Why Transnistria and Russia have accepted implementation of the Free Trade Agreement in the region?

■ **Stanislav Secieru:** Transnistria had no other options. The preferential asymmetric access it benefited from could not extend for 2016. More than 60% of the region's exports are directed to the EU. In fact, Transnistria is exporting more to Romania than to Russia. Losing access to the European market would further accentuate the economic crisis in Transnistria. For these reasons, Transnistria accepted a roadmap whose implementation will ensure access to the European market on the basis of the provisions of the Free Trade Agreement signed between Moldova and the EU.

For Russia, the calculations were both political and economic. Transnistria depends on the Russian gas imports. Even if it exports more to the EU, Transnistria depends on the Russian raw material. Moscow feels comfortable because it keeps control of the economy in the region. Russia is not opposed to the fact that the bill for the maintenance of Transnistria is partly covered by exports to the EU. Looking at the political-military situation, we see that Russia chose not to re-escalate the conflict because its offensive in Ukraine was stopped. Ukraine has managed to put resistance which has surprised Russia. Being stuck in Donbas, Russia opted for political and economic means of influencing Moldova.

What is the role of the Transnistrian factor in the European integration of the Republic of Moldova?

■ **Stanislav Secieru:** It depends on how we perceive it. If we perceive Transnistria as a factor that determines the Government of Chisinau to accelerate the reforms because of the threats coming from there and as a factor that leads to diversification and not to inhibition of energy sources, as a factor which, given the threats, mobilizes the authorities to build an immune and functional state system - Transnistria can be a factor that strengthens the statehood of the Republic of Moldova and brings it de facto to the European Union.

On the other hand, the Transnistrian factor can be perceived as an opportunity to maintain the status quo –and this is not new for the political class in the Republic of Moldova - instrumentalizing the conflict to explain why some reforms cannot be implemented or to divert the public's attention from the reforms that are required.

My opinion is that Transnistria is a two-edged sword. Depending on the way the political class perceives things, the Transnistrian factor can either accelerate or delay the European path.

The whole discussion about whether or not we, with or without Transnistria, can or can't become a member state of the EU is very theoretical and at this moment it is devoid of practical application. Deep internal reforms are a real stake in the relationship with the European Union.

Oana Lungescu: NATO's liaison office in Moldova will be inaugurated in December

NATO spokeswoman **Oana Lungescu** spoke in Brussels about the inauguration of the NATO liaison office in Chisinau, the cooperation with the Republic of Moldova, but also about the perception about the North Atlantic Alliance.

■ **Oana Lungescu:** The NATO liaison office has been operational since spring when Kristina Baleisyte, the head of the office who has been accredited for several months in the Republic of Moldova, arrived in Chisinau. The office collaborates with the Moldovan authorities on important projects that we are running together.

As far as the physical space of the office is concerned, we are now making the final preparations for its inauguration. We expect the physical space of the office to be inaugurated in December. There is no hesitation or delay from NATO. The reason why it was not opened earlier is related to financial procedures and logistical issues. We have such liaison offices in Moscow, Kiev, Tbilisi, and Belgrade - so the office in Chisinau is not unique.

The establishment of the office responds to a request made by the Moldovan Government and is a point of contact meant to facilitate the dialogue that has already been established for many years and to make it even better.

NATO fully respects the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova. The creation of this office doesn't mean integration of the Republic of Moldova into NATO. It is



not about any military presence or any military base of NATO troops. It is a civilian diplomatic representation. The only NATO employee of the office is its head, Kristina Baleisyte. The others will be experts sent from NATO member and partner countries or Moldovan employees.

The purpose of this office is to improve the quality of dialogue and to create an even stronger platform for partnership between the Republic of Moldova and NATO.

What is important is that the pace and scale of this partnership depends on the Republic of Moldova. Some examples of joint projects are the annihilation of pesticides, which means cleaner agricultural land, training, infrastructure to strengthen cyber defense that can help the Republic of Moldova defend itself more effectively against this kind of attacks that are becoming more frequent and more destructive. Also, the defense

capacity strengthening package for the Republic of Moldova means free NATO expertise so that Moldova can rebuild and strengthen its defense and security system.

So the Republic of Moldova benefits from the partnership with NATO and NATO in its turn, benefits from the partnership with the Republic of Moldova, which is a security provider.

NATO is not a military bloc, but a political-military alliance of democratic countries that have democratically decided to become members of the Alliance.

Another important element is that over the past decades NATO has established partnerships with over 40 other states. For example, all our partner countries that are with us in Afghanistan and, in addition, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, countries wishing to join us, were present at the recent meeting of defense ministers. So there are partnerships that are becoming more and more important and wider.

We are often asked what we do about propaganda and misinformation. We see that it is a problem for the political authorities and governments in terms of elections - it is a global issue. As for NATO, our principle is not to counteract propaganda with propaganda, but to try to explain what we are, what we do and to talk with our citizens, our partner countries and our potential adversaries.

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