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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

- 1.** The relationship with the European Union cannot be judged only in black and white. *Tudor Ulianovschi, minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration*
- 2.** Editorial: European aspirations, from promises to reality. *Victoria Bucătaru, executive director, Foreign Policy Association*
- 3.** Euro-integration is not a sprint, but a long-lasting race. *Eugen Caras, Head of Moldovan Mission to the European Union*
- 4.** *Opinion of Parties: We and the world: the foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Moldova*

News in Brief



A record support for the EU in the past 35 years shows the Eurobarometer released on May 23, exactly one year before the European elections in 2019. Namely, 67% of EU citizens believe their country has benefited from being member of EU, this being the highest rate since 1983. Likewise, 60% of Europeans believe that joining the EU is a good thing (the best score since 2007). For the upcoming electoral campaign, the EU citizens have named as priorities the fight against terrorism (49%), youth unemployment (48%), migration (45%), and economic growth (42%). Of the 27,601 people in 28 member countries surveyed, 71% of Romanians think their country has benefited from the EU membership, while 52% believe that things are going in the right direction in the EU. The European average in this respect accounts for 32%.



"Moldova has made reforms in several sectors, but there are areas where more effort is needed in order to achieve tangible results - fighting against corruption, the banking sector and the Electoral Code," said Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, after the fourth EU-Moldova Association Council from May 3rd. On the other hand, Prime Minister Pavel Filip said the reforms have to go hand in hand with the commitment of the European partners to further support our country. In this context, Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, said that in order to receive the first instalment of the macro-financial assistance, Moldova has yet to fulfil two conditions - the National Integrity Authority has to become fully operational and an additional budget has to be adopted to allow for the anti-corruption institutions to function. Thus, the first tranche could arrive in the country in July or in autumn.



The regional development projects and initiatives, the progress in the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU, as well as Bucharest commitment to support Moldova on its European path were the topics discussed in May, during a visit to Chișinău, by the Moldovan authorities, the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Corina Crețu, and the Minister delegate for European Affairs of Romania, Victor Negrescu. Regarding regional initiatives, the officials talked about water supply and sewerage programs, energy efficiency of public buildings, rehabilitation of regional and local roads, and solid waste management. As for Romania's support of Moldova's European agenda, Victor Negrescu said that Romania's Presidency of the EU Council is very important in this sense. At the same time, Victor Negrescu and Pavel Filip discussed the possible issues that could be addressed in a new joint meeting of the Chișinău and Bucharest Executive: elimination of roaming tariffs between the two countries, construction of a Chișinău-Bucharest railway line with European gauge, rehabilitation of bridges, including with EU assistance.

Republic of Moldova, an European path with too many stations?

Sorina Ștefârță

Since 2009, the subject of European integration of the Republic of Moldova has been a constant one on the political agenda of the country. During this time, we have succeeded in being both the "success story" and the "disappointment" of the Eastern Partnership, whether it is the well-known bank fraud, the dramatic redesign of former European promoters or the election of a head of state who namely on anti-Europeanism has built his campaign and affirmed himself in the political life of the country.

In spite of these turbulences, all the governments we have had in the last nine years have firmly supported the promotion of the European course of the Republic of Moldova as the only viable chance of modernizing the country. In its turn, although aware of the turbulences, the European Union has continued to support - in a kind of



wise silence of the Chinese water torture - hundreds of development projects in our country. From tens of thousands to tens and millions of euros. Either directly or through assistance from the Member States. From the north to the south of the republic. So, today, thanks to the European assistance thousands of people in the Moldovan villages have tap water and renovated roads. Even if many (pretend that) don't know about it...

And yet, if it's to believe the (Moldovan) polls, the pro-EU option is growing again

among our fellow citizens. Just like the already-EU members say, for the first time since 2007, in an opinion poll of 27,000 people from the 28 member states, that their "voice counts in the Union".

When will our European presence come? As it is known that the future can lose from its charm if it is awaited too long... And where are we today on this road that seems to have more stations than we have originally imagined? We have tried to answer these questions in the current issue of our newsletter.

The relationship with the European Union cannot be judged only in black and white

Tudor Ulianovschi, minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration

In May, they speak about Europe more than usual. And that's because it is exactly the time when the European Union celebrates its beginning, which was put on May 9, 1950 by the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman ... For about a decade, Europe Day has been celebrated also in the Republic of Moldova, serving as an occasion to bring the European values closer to the citizens of the country, through numerous events organized in different regions. It is also a good occasion for the authorities to assess where we are in our Euro-integration process. We wanted to discuss this with HE Tudor Ulianovschi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. And because he had just opened the International Exhibition of Francophone Artists and Sculptors "Unity in Light and Diversity in Colours and Forms" organised by the Ministry in the International Year of Francophonie 2018, we have started from French...

- Mr. Ulianovschi, is Francophonie still a viable project in an Anglophone and even Chinese world?

- The Republic of Moldova remains a Francophone country, we only need to rediscover this quality. In addition, it is the cultural and artistic heritage that is binding us. That's why I came up with the initiative to organize this unique exhibition, bringing together works of painters and sculptors from different countries. It is an example which shows that we can take the initiative to change the image of Moldova from the country that usually reacts to one that acts. I am the advocate of a dynamic diplomacy, with an emphasis on public and economic diplomacy. And Francophonie can be a means of promoting our country - especially in the context of the growing regional and international role of France - and anchoring us further in the European space of values. At the same time, Francophonie can be the element to use in order to strengthen the Moldovan-French political and economic relations.



- However, France has always been a "difficult" country for the Republic of Moldova – both while negotiating the visa liberalization regime, and the Association Agreement...

- That is why a pragmatic approach is needed, constantly promoting the public and cultural diplomacy. They are soft-power tools that have proven their efficiency. Yes, politically it is not easy. But we are an associated EU country that wants to integrate into the EU - this is what we should focus on. Intelligently and without forcing the issue we should make the most of our Francophonie and Eastern Partnership membership.

„ We are planning to have diplomatic presence on each continent”

- How would you define the role of the Republic of Moldova in the regional geopolitical context?

- We have to start from the fact that we are a small state, but there are many states with similar territories playing internationally. For us it is important to have stability and to capitalize on our presence in various international bodies by focusing on key issues - human rights, children, the environment, etc. Ideally, we should identify major subjects in which we

can be leaders. It sounds ambitious, but not impossible. Because, when certain countries or groups of countries have divergences on different subjects, they are looking for mediators - neutral countries with special linguistic skills. For this, we should continuously develop our diplomatic corps and international negotiation skills, which is why we have started to identify partnerships with diplomatic academies in other countries. And we still have to work with different regions of the world. That is why one of our priorities in the near future is to have diplomatic presence on each continent. I refer to Latin America, Africa and Asia in the region of India - a country that is becoming a global economy.

- Is the recently inaugurated Embassy in the United Arab Emirates part of this strategic objective?

- For us, the opening of the Abu Dhabi embassy has had two key objectives: diaspora and economy. I met with some 70 countrymen there, who are having very good positions, working for prestigious companies, and who came gladly at the inauguration of the embassy. As far as the economic aspect is concerned, we can regard it as an investment which, if properly managed, should generate income. The United Arab Emirates offers the largest amount of development assistance in the world. And this means potential sources of investment - infrastructure, road construction, etc. In addition, we will be able to use our advantage of an agrarian country and export there dried fruit, jams, nuts, honey. I have also initiated, as Minister, negotiations on the legal framework in order to protect investments, avoid double taxation, eventually liberalize the free trade regime, etc.

- Since you have mentioned about neutrality, what do we do with NATO? Are we staying within the existing framework or trying to promote a paradigm shift in society?

- The Republic of Moldova is a neutral country that also develops a successful

partnership with the North Atlantic Alliance. And there are many examples of this kind in the world. In December 2017, the NATO Liaison Office in Chisinau was inaugurated and nothing serious has happened in the meantime- no tanks entered the country as some politicians or media have been speculating. For us, cooperation with NATO in the field of national security is particularly important, but also in partnerships that provide us with expertise and training for our military, modernizing the army and defence resources so that we are able to respond effectively to emergencies. We hope to collaborate in this respect with the NATO Centers of Excellence and Training in the Baltic States. In addition, there is the "Blue Helmet" Battalion 22 which is participating in the UN peacekeeping mission in Kosovo and which is a good school for our soldiers. Every country should have such resources. And our goal is to build a link between NATO's cooperation on the security dimension and the security policy of the European Union.

„The Western Balkans is a very positive precedent for us“

- How do you see today's Europe?

- The period of time Europe is going through is one of great challenges. The economic crisis and the flow of refugees have led to internal political changes in several EU countries. Likewise, Brexit is affecting the structure of the Union and it will depend on the EU's capacity to consolidate itself internally, to have a coherent defence and security policy, etc. Personally, I think the EU will be able to face these challenges. For us the impact is direct and we are feeling it through the economic crisis and the EU's enlargement policy. In recent years, several voices have said the Union is experiencing a period of fatigue and reflection on enlargement. But we have a very positive precedent for us today - the Western Balkans. There are very clear messages that the EU wants to address the Balkan issue, ie to expand and ensure the European integration of these countries. So the EU is not tired. It is now up to us to work harder and to revitalize the reform process.

- And if it is a simple territorial balance, with the departure of Britain? In addition, there is a risk of Italy joining Great Britain, about which the Bloomberg Agency was writing recently,

that it could become a bubble able to blow up the European Union...

- I would not simplify it that much. I think there is a rather clear EU vision of geopolitical expansion and of ensuring that the Western Balkans is an area of democracy and economic development with a sustainable market economy and a state governed by the rule of law. And, I would repeat it- I see in this a mobilizing example for us ... With regard to Italy, in an optimistic and realistic manner, I believe that the future Italian Government understands that it needs an integrated and stable country within the EU, to keep pace with the economic growth and to be able to control the southern border in line with the Community policies in the field. For us, which have several hundred thousand citizens out there, the stability of Italy matters a lot. So far, we have had good news – the negotiations on the Social Security Agreement have been finalized recently, providing our fellow citizens there with more social guarantees.

„ The direction is correct, we just need to increase speed“

- In our relationship with the EU, is the "teacher-student" formula still valid, the latter being punished in case of disobedience or failure?

- I think we have reached a point of irreversibility in the process of European integration, so we cannot speak of this somewhat simplistic formula, even if it is seen as a solution by some of our fellow citizens. What remains valid though is the premise which we have started on the road with - the people of the Republic of Moldova should also want the European path. Nobody is forcing us to join the EU, but we understand this is our only chance to build a stable and prosperous future. And here comes a classic situation for the relationship with a development partner, which can also be defined by a "teacher-student" formula - in order to obtain funding, clear assessment criteria are established and, why not? These are conditionalities in the good sense of the word. Also in our case, the EU comes up with conditions in different areas - justice, human rights, media, the banking sector, agriculture. It is a natural thing that mobilizes us to be concrete and coherent: who and how long we have to fulfil the commitments made.

- How "in pace" are we with meeting these commitments?

- If we are to refer to the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement, which is the key document in our daily work, we are at about 70+ percent in figures, which is not bad. But I'm always saying not to just look at the figures, but to focus on both the content and the results. And if the progress is slow, let's speed it up ... At the same time, the openness of the EU is also vital - in our case it also comes in the form of macro-financial assistance. The assistance will come either in July or September, it is more of a technical matter. From our point of view, the conditions for the first tranche have been fulfilled and we hope to have the European Commission's understanding on this issue. We are currently working on the conditions for the second tranche, which mainly targets the economy and the banking financial sector. And here the message from Brussels was also positive.

- However, the conclusions of the last EU-Moldova Association Council from May 3rd were "read" differently by the government - which ensures us that everything is good - and by the civil society which is pro-European, but sceptical of the Government optimism.

- In my opinion, the EU message was extremely clear. On the one hand, the results achieved on the Free Trade Area have been appreciated, in recent years the European Union being our economic partner no. 1, as well as the efforts for the stabilization of the banking sector in the country. On the other hand, concerns have been reiterated about the bank fraud investigation process. In the justice sector, there have been appreciated the creation of the National Integrity Authority, the appointment of its Director and Deputy Director, and the beginning of the recruitment process. At the same time, the importance of speeding up this process has been reiterated. So, we have had a close and continuous monitoring of the government actions by EU. We have not been told that we are going in a wrong direction - rather that the speed is slower than it is expected. But we should not judge in black and white- it is an assessment of the current situation that should have a mobilizing effect for us.

- At the recent meeting with the EU diplomats, you announced that the Republic of Moldova has presented a "reflection paper" aimed at

strengthening the bilateral cooperation with the EU and the Eastern Partnership. What is it about?

- It is rather a vision of how we see the sectoral cooperation with the EU in areas such as transport, energy, IT, the environment, security, etc. The idea is to create common working groups on these sectors and themes, which will bring us even closer to the community space. De facto, that aims at achieving the integration before the political integration itself and to demonstrate that the Republic of Moldova is compatible with the European Union both in terms of regulations and internal situation. And the European partners are open for such an approach. We have already seen it in their relationship with Ukraine and, above all, with Georgia, which is soon going to launch the Tbilisi-European Commission joint committee on various themes. It is sort of joint meetings of the Government on the Georgia-Brussels axis. Thus, each minister or head of agency will have a direct link with his/her EU counterpart.

„ We want to attract the best personnel“

- How do you assess the institutional capacity to achieve the provisions of the Association Agreement, as it is known that there is a big deficit of people everywhere?

- We are still in the process of reorganizing the governmental structure and in this process it is not easy at all to make sure that we don't lose the human and professional capital from various state structures and that we maintain the institutional memory, but also the motivation of the civil servants. I also believe that once the administrative reform is completed, we will have all the necessary institutional elements to make our work efficient - and not just in the field of European integration. This will also happen due to the optimization of financial resources, because we have to reach a point when it will not be shameful or bad to work for the state. Until then, we are thinking of a possible EU support formula for civil servants, but also for teachers and doctors - professions that are important in the long run. It is something that has been applied in some countries and we should try to get such support as well. We need it for a period of at least three to four years, when doctors, professors or civil servants will have financial security. That's how we will be able to attract the best personnel.

- By the way, regarding the best personnel, to what extent the case of former Ambassador Aurel Ciocoi- who opted for the position of Presidential advisor on foreign policy instead of working for the Foreign Office- was a crisis for the Ministry?

- I would prefer to call it *exception*, rather than *crisis*, although I admit it was an unexpected move for us. And that's because we are striving at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to capitalize on all people, especially on those with medium and long-term experience. The approach is open and engaging- all colleagues are encouraged to come up with proposals and initiatives. Most of us have experience in different diplomatic missions, which means that everyone can bring at least a positive element from the country where he/she worked and apply it to our realities. We have permanent dialogue with colleagues and I'm claiming that I'm trying to be a good coach on the play field. Of course, it is regrettable that such an experienced person as Mr. Ciocoi has made this decision. However, it is up to him to decide for himself, while we should continue doing our work.

„ We want a clear message on the membership perspective“

- What are the instructions for the members of diplomatic service of the country?

- If I were to say it in a few words, they would be: economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, promoting national culture, European integration. These are also the messages we will reiterate in the next months, during events with the participation of the members of diplomatic missions, which will be held in Chisinau. It is about the consuls' meeting, which will take place in June. In July, after a six-year break, our ambassadors will meet. They will be exchanging information for four days in all areas, discussing with the business and associative business representatives, being given concrete and result-oriented tasks. Our diplomacy is a good one, but constant communication is needed, otherwise the connection is lost ...In October we are planning a reunion of more than 50 honorary consuls of the Republic of Moldova - a valuable concept as consuls have the mission to promote economic cooperation and investment with their country of residence, where we often do not have diplomatic representations. It doesn't mean, however, that we are not monitoring

them. Recently, we have completed the internal procedure for assessing the work of honorary consuls and have even withdrawn the mandates of five consuls who haven't done their job ... So we will invite them to celebrate the Wine Festival and will encourage them to bring along businesses people in their countries.

- In May, almost simultaneously, Chisinau was visited by the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Corina Crețu, and the Deputy Minister for European Affairs of Romania, Victor Negrescu. One of the topics discussed was the Romanian Presidency of the European Union starting from 1 January 2019. What initiatives is the Republic of Moldova planning to undertake in this context in order to make full use of the promised openness?

- Romania remains for us a multidimensional strategic partner - bilateral, European, international. It is also our main bilateral economic partner- we have large-scale projects in the banking, energy and assistance sectors. For the Romanian Presidency of the EU we have already some ideas, which we are trying to summarise in a vision. I think we need to focus on organizing sectoral meetings on different topics, working within the Moldovan-Romanian Commission on European Integration. We have agreed with Mr Negrescu on the development of a common calendar of activities in favour of the European integration process of our country. We are also aware of the fact that, as EU president, Romania will have its own challenges, e.g Brexit, and the community budget. That is why we cannot count only on Romania, we should be proactive and promote our agenda, including capitalizing on the support of other countries. However, speaking of this concrete period, we hope that during the Romanian Presidency of the EU we will get a clear message on the prospect of Moldova's accession.

- Having four years of “visa-free” and almost four years of Association and Free Trade Area with the EU, Republic of Moldova looks more...

- More open as a country. More economically developed. Closer to Europe.

- Thank you for the interview and I wish you success.

Sorina Ștefăruță

Editorial

European aspirations, from promises to reality

Victoria Bucătaru,
Executive Director,
Foreign Policy Association

For some time now, the European aspirations of the Republic of Moldova has become a less pleasant topic for discussion in the European circles. The latter are disappointed by the lack of progress in the key areas and although they recognize the sovereign right of each state to decide its fate, they don't rush to declare officially the prospect of the EU enlargement to Eastern Europe. Moreover, more and more often, there is talk about enlargement fatigue, "garnished" with internal problems such as migration and the need to secure the borders, but also the increased social inequality.

Speaking to the European Parliament in April this year, the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker highlighted the need for the European Union to open up to the Western Balkans, referring to the possibility of giving the countries in the region the EU candidate status with a view to avoiding any possible war in the region. Mr. Juncker's optimism and conviction is no longer the same when it comes to the countries of Eastern Europe. His statements made at the Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2017, when he mentioned that the European Union is not ready for enlargement, serve as evidence. This different rhetoric, controversial even in both Chisinau and Brussels, creates confusion among citizens as well as vulnerabilities when it comes to policies and strategic cooperation opportunities.

Being fully aware of the difficulty of the relationship with the European Union - in particular, the lack of confidence of the Euro-Atlantic partners towards the "sincerity" with which the Republic of Moldova does its homework and meets its commitments - the authorities in Chisinau are stubbornly sending messages about having overcome the state of crisis and having restored the cooperation with the EU by ensuring economic stability and engaging in a broad reform process. And it is for the economic experts to confirm if the economic stability is genuine or camouflaged. It is certain though that Frederica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has underscored recently the need to finalize without delay the bank fraud investigation. Moreover, following a



meeting with Prime Minister Pavel Filip, the EU official said very clearly and bluntly: "We have requested this for many years and now we are expecting it to happen because the current situation is difficult to understand."

It is difficult to understand "this situation" also by the Moldovan citizens who, trapped by the promises made by their own political elites, are either leaving the country in search for a better life, or falling prey to the social-institutional "debauchery", the most recent example being the elections in the village Jora de Mijloc from Orhei district.

The pro-European messages of the authorities are less convincing in Brussels but also in Chisinau, where the new rhetoric of the European Union is starting to take shape. The European officials are emphasizing increasingly that the EU support is given to citizens of the Republic of Moldova, not to the authorities or political parties. Thus, the European institutions are avoiding being associated with any party, leaving it to the European political families.

The struggle for the Chisinau City Hall, which has just been concluded, represents, albeit on a smaller scale, the voters' preference and electoral mood. The lack of electoral programs and convincing debates has once again brought the geopolitical vote into perspective. To what extent they will be able to exploit it in the autumn parliamentary elections remains to be seen, but it is clear that, in order to re-establish the relationship with the European Union, there is need for painful reforms and concrete results as just promises and superficial progress won't do.

Euro-integration is not a sprint, but a long-lasting race

Eugen Caras, Head of Moldovan Mission to the European Union

Given his function, Ambassador Eugen Caras is one of the persons who knows the Euro-integration “kitchen” from within. He considers himself lucky that during his term he witnessed two major achievements on the European path of our country - the liberalization of the visa regime and the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union. And this is what he would tell his grandchildren or write memories about if it had to happen ... He admits it was first and foremost the result of a teamwork with his colleagues from Chisinau, in particular, those from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration.

About four years of association

„We are in the fourth year of implementation of the Association Agreement and my impression is that things are good, even if we always want more. The best results have been achieved with the Free Trade Area: about 65% of our exports go to the EU market, while 50% of imports come from the EU. Now, it is important not to lose speed and make sure that the benefits of the Association Agreement and of the Free Trade Area are felt as much as the benefits of the visa-free regime. Because people have already got used to moving freely – more than 1.5 million Moldovans have traveled for four years in the Schengen area - and they do not remember the times when they were fighting for a visa. The challenge is to keep advancing on this path being able to address the multiple internal and external challenges. This requires understanding and peace in society”.

About accession and strategic expectation

„ Accession is a two-way road. We must do our homework and be prepared to join



in a certain time horizon, but also the EU should be ready to accept us. For while the institutions are more understanding, we will have to work more with the member states. Euro-integration is not a sprint, but a long-lasting race. As a result, the so-called strategic expectation is needed. Our mission is to change things for the better and only then the perception here in Brussels will change. The world will get convinced that we are not a burden or a difficult pupil, but a partner that can contribute to the stability and security of the EU. So the priority is to implement the Agreement and, with it, to modernize our country. Its revision or even its denunciation that we hear about quite often is unlikely. Any politician and any government looks at the statistics. And the figures here show benefits from the relationship with the European Union.”

About commitment and ... achievement

„Everything starts with something - negotiations-agreement-implementation. That is why I disagree with the statement that things happen only on paper. If we look at the Conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council from 26 February, at the Report of the European Commission and the European

External Action Service published on the eve of the EU-Moldova Association Council and at the Joint Press Release issued by the Association Council from May 3rd we will see that there is an explicit recognition of results. Yes, the EU is telling us that we still have enough work to do in reforming the judiciary, frightening against corruption, investigating the bank fraud or money laundering. But there is a way to go. The most eloquent proof is that we have basically met the conditions for receiving the first tranche of the macro-financial assistance - ten out of the 28 conditionalities. I understand the results do not happen overnight. But efforts are being made to create a framework and institutions to function. The National Integrity Agency, for instance, is already recruiting integrity inspectors. But it is certain that the money will come when all the newly created agencies are operational. So let’s see what the situation will be like in July. I’d like to think we will get the first tranche.”

About „more for more” and future

„More for more remains a valid principle. Those who will show results will get bigger support, and this is about the conditional support provided to our country. There are now negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework, the Commission has come up with proposals to the EU Budget for 2021-2027, but the neighborhood component, as we understand, will be present. I’m saying “understand”, because it will require also the consent of the European Parliament that will be elected in 2019 and on whom our future will somehow depend. And its configuration, apparently, will undergo changes as the populists- who are also the Eurosceptics - will increase numerically. However, the pro-EU classical parties will keep their “share package”. Our interest is that the EU remains open to enlargement and have continuity in this respect”.

About disputed and forward-looking issues

„Even if they are criticized by a part of civil society, from the point of view of our European partners, the latest developments on the Transnistrian issue represent a breakthrough. They don't see it as a concession what we have decided, for example, about the car license plates. On the contrary, it's a proof for them that we are looking for and open to solutions, that we have political will to solve current issues. Another issue we are working on aims at boosting cooperation in the Free Trade Area among the three associated countries and namely, the cooperation with the EU in the 3 + 1 format - between the EU and Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. And this offers huge scope for growth in various fields. For the time being, this dialogue is not formalized, but the meeting of the trade ministers of the three countries plus Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom has already been planned for September”.

About the Romanian Presidency of the EU

„We have a very good dialogue between Chisinau and Bucharest on this subject. It is important for our ambitions to be balanced with Romania's possibilities as EU President. Of course we have very high hopes from this mandate. We understand that it will be difficult to achieve something on enlargement, so I think the emphasis will be put on strengthening the relations. We will not succeed if we are in isolation. So we have to anchor ourselves in the European space and most helpful is to look at what our neighbours have done and cooperate with them. A positive current development is the consolidation of the enlargement message for the Western Balkans. This means the enlargement has not stopped, and that it will continue - maybe by 2025- for these countries, and later for us. I see the glass half full. In a logic way, we should be part of the next wave”.

Sorina Ștefăruță,
Brussels, 18 May 2018

Opinion of Parties

We and the world: the foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Moldova

The “Opinion of Parties” column was launched in the context of the 2018 electoral year and provides the political parties and potential aspirants to the Moldovan parliament with an additional platform to make public their position on various social and political issues of major interest to citizens. This time, we have asked representatives of four parties to tell us about their party's foreign policy vision.

1. From the point of view of your party, which are and which should eventually be the strategic priorities of the Republic of Moldova in the field of foreign policy, taking into account the increasingly globalized world in which we live?
2. For years, the major issues and also problems of the Europeanisation of the country are those pertaining to the key reforms: fighting against corruption, justice, central public administration, freedom of expression and access to information. What should the government, society, and political parties do in order to trigger mechanisms to make these processes irreversible and thus to boost European progress?
3. Romania is seen as the main advocate and most faithful partner of the European integration of the Republic of Moldova - especially in the context of Romania's EU Presidency starting in January 2019. What concrete initiatives should the Republic of Moldova launch during the Romanian Presidency of the European Union in order to make full use of the open promise?

European integration, a binding commitment for any future coalition government



Andrian Candu, deputy chairman of the Democratic Party of Moldova

1.

The Republic of Moldova has to transpose the *acquis communautaire*, partially agreed upon by the Moldova - EU Association Agreement, and strengthen the Transatlantic Strategic Partnership with the United States of America. These are the foreign policy priorities of the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) on which we have been focusing since January 2016, when we de-blocked the country, delivering multiple internal reforms. The European integration of the Republic of Moldova is a medium and long-term goal, as well as a commitment of the future governing coalition. In the absence of a concrete commitment or



without being aware at both political and societal level that this is a viable and absolutely necessary country project, we are risking to get stuck and lose the current opportunities. In the short term, in the relationship with the European Union, the Democratic Party seeks to build confidence and ensure the continuity of cooperation and assistance programs, as well as to diversify the economic relations with the community space to the benefit of Moldovan citizens. In other words, the PDM goal is political association with the EU and integration into the economic area of the EU. The steps taken so far and the reforms implemented have contributed to the stabilization of the Republic of Moldova, laying the ground for its development - hence, as I have said above, the European integration should be seen as a country project.

As for the transatlantic strategic partnership with the United States and Canada, the Democratic Party is making every effort to make this foreign policy priority a tangible result for Moldovan citizens. The United States is a provider of security and prosperity, have important interests in our region, so the continued rapprochement with the US administration will remain an important priority for us. We have a newly appointed Ambassador, we have benefited from Washington's support in our efforts to strengthen the country's security and we hope that in the future, Moldova will become an increasingly attractive destination for the US investors. As far as Canada is concerned, this country presents us with an example of a multi-ethnic state of socially oriented integration based on a single civic nation - the Canadian one.

An important dimension of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova is our relationship with international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the United Nations Organisation. From our point of view, the support of these organizations should remain one of the priorities of the ruling coalition, given their valuable expertise and our internal financial

needs, as well as the need to adapt to a globalizing world. Last but not least, the relations with the neighbouring countries should be among Moldova's strategic priorities: Romania, as a member state of the European Union, and Ukraine as a member of the Eastern Partnership. These relations are particularly important for our country, both for economic and regional security reasons. Romania is undoubtedly the closest partner of the Republic of Moldova at the European level and it is the country that has invested and is investing massive confidence in us.

2.

First of all, I'd like to give assurances that the Democratic Party has taken firm actions in all the above-mentioned areas, appreciated also by the country's foreign partners. There are certain backlogs in some areas for the reason that these are extremely complex areas where the reforming process is a lasting one. However, if we look at the results, the fight against corruption has been accelerated by the current ruling coalition, making institutional progress - new institutions have been created - as well as providing for independence through increased wage budgets. Justice, for its part, is undergoing a profound reform processes, including the Democratic Party's commitment to strengthen the institutions ensuring progress in this area. The central public administration reform began with a drastic reduction in the number of ministries - from 16 to 9 ministries - and continues making all institutions involved more efficient, the ultimate goal being to have a more efficient administration with professional and motivated people. In terms of freedom of expression and access to information, which is an extremely wide area, we are talking primarily about more transparency at the level of authorities, but also about the efforts of the Democratic Party to provide a framework for the media and civil society to function properly. For both components, the government needs to continue improving the legislation in collaboration with external partners. The Council of Europe

and Freedom House, at our request, will provide us with their expertise in the next period on the new draft of the Audiovisual Media Services Code. A month ago we launched debates also on a new legal framework for NGOs. The draft code includes a series of innovations related to the legal organization form of CSOs and we are working together with the civil society on finding compromises for the draft to be put for vote in the second reading.

I believe the governance should continue the dialogue with all the actors involved, including with external partners, and implement the projects that target the above mentioned areas. At the level of political parties, however, in the light of the up-coming parliamentary elections, a cross-party engagement is needed in every field, starting with the anti-corruption fight. In other words, it is necessary that the parties participating in the electoral race commit themselves to making the anti-corruption fight a priority, regardless of the position they will have in the future legislative. Otherwise, it is up to the society to punish those who don't commit to such priorities, don't present a serious project and who may hide behind the "West versus East" debate. We shouldn't neglect the role of the civil society which in its turn should detach itself from certain party interests, political affiliation and better fulfil its mission of punishing the abuses in the society.

3.

The Romania's Presidency of the European Union Council represents a major opportunity for the Republic of Moldova. Although the Eastern Partnership was supported also by other countries holding the rotating presidency, it is for the first time that we can think in concrete terms about this EU mechanism. In this respect, the Republic of Moldova should, with the support of Romania, aim to strengthen the dialogue with the European Union. We should make our presence felt in Bucharest and Brussels and address issues common to the partners in the region - security, economic cooperation, fighting

against foreign propaganda. It is also an appropriate time for the Republic of Moldova to bring back the question of the presence of Russian army on the territory of our country, with all the implications of this difficult situation, including the issue of separatism and Moscow's influence in the region.

At the same time, I would very much like Moldova to be more dynamic in the club of South Eastern European countries, a club that enjoys a clear relationship as commitment, performance indicators, and very important to me – time frame. I would like to remind you that the Republic of Moldova is a member of various regional initiatives and structures such as the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), observer at the Center for Security Cooperation RACVIAC. Our goal is to obtain a clear European perspective and join countries with the same aspirations.

At the same time and onto the next order of business, the Republic of Moldova could launch joint initiatives with Romania to combat phenomena that affect especially Western and Eastern Balkan countries, such as economic migration and the protection of the rights of citizens from the diaspora. The Republic of Moldova can also propose common cultural events and initiatives, demonstrating both the common cultural space and the common European destiny.

True Europeanization can only take place by strengthening the democracy



Mihai Popșoi, deputy chairman of the Action and Solidarity Party

1.

The priority of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova should start from the premise of capitalizing on the opportunities and diminishing the risks posed by an increasingly interdependent world – this is possible to attain by aligning our country to a global power pole such as the European Union. In addition to economic, social and cultural benefits, the EU is a world leader in the development and promotion of standards in various fields. And because tariff barriers are no longer an effective means of competition for outlets, namely non-tariff barriers - such as technical and normative standards - are the main competitive asset. At the same time, the EU is becoming an important actor in the security architecture. Having major vulnerabilities in this area, we could benefit significantly from the EU's common foreign and defense policy. Therefore, the Party of Action and Solidarity is guided by the conviction that the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU and the anchoring of our country into the Euro-Atlantic space of values should be a strategic priority.

2.

The real Europeanisation of the country can only take place in the context of strengthening of democracy and the rule of law. In order for the complex and lasting process of transition to be successful, both technical and material aspects should be taken into account. The strengthening of democratic institutions contributes to ensuring the irreversibility of the process of modernization and Europeanization. Civil society, including political parties, should facilitate the process of institutional consolidation of democracy through the development, promotion and adoption of the regulatory framework, and, above all, by ensuring that this legal framework is respected. At this stage, the political will to liberate justice, public administration, the media, trade unions from the improper political interference is imperative.

However, given the chronic lack of progress in this area, it is becoming clear that the reforms designed to diminish the political control over some independent institutions - such as those responsible for combating corruption - can only take place in the condition of a new political class without links to the existing clientelist political system. The role of civil society, media and the associative sector is fundamental in the democratization and Europeanisation of the society. Similarly, a new political class can only emerge if there is such a demand from society. Because, without insuring internal conditions, the European Union's conditionality on democratization and the rule of law will never be able to achieve the expected result.

3.

There is already a number of ambitious initiatives that should be realised before we set new goals. For example, the energetic interconnection of the Republic of Moldova with the European market through Romania or the completion of the interconnection of the gas supply system - a process which, unfortunately, is facing more and more difficulties. Then there is the interconnection of the power supply systems, a process that is only in the phase of feasibility studies. Meanwhile, in order to reduce the country's energy dependence, projects to ensure the energy efficiency of both public and private spaces must be continued and multiplied. The generous EU support for such projects has been and remains irreplaceable. Another very important aspect for the development of the Republic of Moldova, but also for the whole region, is the construction of a motorway. But such ideas remain dreams at this stage. They are not realistic plans of public policy. Cooperation with Romania in a less complex framework, such as a joint peacekeeping or emergency response battalion, has proven to be problematic and no progress has been made three years after the launch of the idea. Another initiative discussed at both European and regional level in the Eastern Partnership and bilaterally with Romania is to reduce or eliminate tariffs

on roaming calls. All these initiatives are beneficial, but there should be initiatives to consolidate democracy and the rule of law. The exchange of good practices, as well as the analysis of less successful experiences between EU and Eastern Partnership countries - especially Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine - including the institutionalization of the process, would be auspicious. It is certain that the Party of Action and Solidarity, once elected after the parliamentary elections, will boost the European integration process and try to make the most of the opportunities created during the Romanian Presidency of the EU and not just that.

The rule of law should be reformed from scratch



Andrei Năstase, chairman of the Dignity and Truth Platform

1.

Regarding Moldova's strategic foreign policy priorities, the Dignity and Truth Platform (DA) outlined in the Party's Political Program several basic elements defining a balanced foreign policy. And the main element there is the European integration objective. In the DA Platform vision, this desideratum is primarily understood as an element of democratization and modernization of the country. Starting from this approach, the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union should develop at a much higher level. It is important for the Republic of Moldova to implement truly structural reforms in order to capitalize

on the opportunities offered by the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Area with the EU. Other strategic foreign policy priorities include: strengthening relations with the EU and the US, strategic partnership with Romania, achieving territorial reintegration of the country with the support of foreign partners, promoting mutually beneficial relations with Ukraine and Russia. A problematic aspect of our relationship with Ukraine is related to the actions of the Kiev authorities in the administration of the Nistean Hydro-power Complex, which generates the risk of an ecological and humanitarian catastrophe. Another central element of our foreign policy is the promotion of economic diplomacy.

2.

A fundamental problem for the Republic of Moldova is the failure of the mechanisms of the rule of law, which led to serious consequences for our country: the capture of state institutions, the antidemocratic abuses of government, the alarming rise of human rights violations, impoverishment of the population, economic and social degradation, and mass exodus. For this reason, strengthening the rule of law, strengthening the capacity of the institutions responsible for combating corruption, justice reform and the reform of the regulatory and control agencies should become priorities for any democratic governance. No political and economic initiatives can be seriously discussed without reforming the rule of law. At present, the Republic of Moldova needs more than ever to implement the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership referring to: stable institutions as guarantors of democracy; the rule of law; human rights; protection of minorities. In order to solve these systemic problems, it is necessary first and foremost to change the political class, which will create prerequisites for reforming the rule of law. In this sense, the first step is to ensure the alternation to power over this oligarchic regime.

Measures for reforming justice include: dismissal of all corrupt and politically controlled judges, including the use of extended confiscation mechanisms based on the model of several European countries; reform the Superior Council of Magistracy, including changing the composition of the SCM by bringing competent and honest people; attracting a certain number of foreign judges for a period of two to four years, which will ensure the justice in the most serious crimes committed during 2009-2018; ensuring reassessment of judges in office, ensuring judges' independence; appointment as General Prosecutor of a professional and person of integrity of European size; guaranteeing the real procedural independence of prosecutors; clear, transparent selection, appointment and promotion of prosecutors; ensuring real independence of the National Anti-corruption Centre from political influence and other external phenomena; reforming of the National Integrity Agency. These measures represent only a small part of the process of reforming the rule of law and Europeanization of the Republic of Moldova.

3.

The Dignity and Truth Platform considers Romania as a strategic partner of the Republic of Moldova, as well as an advocate of the country's integration process. In the context of Romania's EU Presidency, starting from January 1, 2019, Chisinau should capitalize on this position in the following aspects: boosting the European integration process of the country by capitalizing on the opportunities provided by the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Area; increasing the opportunities for the economic development of our country, including by expanding the access of Moldovan products to the EU and Romanian market; attracting European projects; strengthening the capacity of Moldovan institutions; boosting energy interconnection processes with Romania, etc. We will ask for the support of Romania

and other European states and institutions in taking action to persuade the Ukrainian side to abandon the projects related to the Dniester Hydro-power Complex that threatens the national security of the Republic of Moldova.

A mix based on political will, civic education, expertise and support



Anatol Șalaru, chairman of the National Unity Party

1.

I believe that the strategic priority of the Republic of Moldova should be decoupling from the Russian Federation, the exit from CIS and, above all, the elimination of dependencies of any kind on this state. A second major priority is the rapprochement with the European Union,

the maximization of interdependencies with this structure and - although we have no prospect of accession and I do not think we will have it in the next 20 years - the participation through the European Union in the global economy, in the great socio-economic and scientific-technological transformations that are taking place at the moment. Also, in the opinion of the National Unity Party (PUN), it is vital to ensure the security of the Republic of Moldova by renouncing the detrimental neutrality and by developing partnerships with NATO or even joining it.

2.

Europeanization of the country is not a very easy process, especially if we take into account the history of the territory between the Prut and the Nistru. In the opinion of PUN, the Europeanization of the Republic of Moldova cannot be achieved beyond the Romanian identity. We will succeed in the process of modernization and Europeanization only if we admit that we are Romanians. Concerning the issues that you are referring to, apart from political will, justice independence, and independence of local and central public administration, there is need for solid support of the development partners. No country in the former Socialist bloc has succeeded in the above-mentioned areas without the EU and USA support. I think we need a mix based on political will, civic

education, expertise and support from our development partners.

3.

Bucharest is more than the main advocate of the European integration of the Republic of Moldova, especially that almost one million Moldovans have Romanian citizenship. The Romanian Presidency of the EU is a good opportunity to bring Moldova to the attention of the European countries, to better explain the dimension of the challenges we face - especially the one related to the Transnistrian conflict. Moreover, we believe that in the six months of the Romanian EU presidency, but also as part of the EU troika, the Republic of Moldova should launch projects related to the internal transport infrastructure, connection of the country to the EU infrastructure, continuing the connection of the national energy system to the European one, etc. I also believe that the Republic of Moldova should seek access to regional development funds, as well as to other European funds, in order to support Moldovan farmers. Another important area is education and innovation. The affiliation of our young people to the European education, research and innovation system is one of the key projects that the Republic of Moldova can start under the Presidency of Romania to the European Union.

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Foreign Policy Association (APE) is a non-governmental organization committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country Europeanization. APE was established in fall 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public personalities and former senior officials and diplomats, all of them reunited by their commitment to contribute with their expertise and experience to formulating and promoting by the Republic of Moldova of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy.



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