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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Mădălin Necșuțu, editor-coordinator

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Știri pe scurt:



President Maia Sandu announced that the Moldovan citizens will be able, starting from 2022, to be officially employed in Germany for seasonal work. Most such jobs are in agriculture. The announcement was made by Maia Sandu in a press conference with the President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who is in the Republic of Moldova for a two-day visit, between September 29-30. Germany has an estimated shortage of seasonal workers in 2020 of around 300,000 workers in agriculture, especially for the fruit and vegetable picking, and German farmers are looking for such seasonal workers. Many of the seasonal workers in Germany currently come from Romania and Poland. Germany has a lot of seasonal workers in EU countries and it also needs workers from third countries.



Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilă paid her first visit to Brussels between September 27-28, where she discussed with European officials about Moldova's reform plans and the reforms it has been implementing, but also about the decision to disburse the second tranche of the EU OMNIBUS assistance to the Republic of Moldova. It is about an amount of 50 million euros, non-reimbursable funds, money that will arrive in Chisinau at the beginning of October. Natalia Gavrilă has discussed in Brussels about justice and anti-corruption reform, including the investigation of the 1 billion USD bank fraud, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic and social support package needed to relaunch economic growth. "The EU is open to continue the support of the Republic of Moldova and of the ambitious reform agenda it proposes. Moldova is an important and priority partner for us", said in his turn the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, during the meeting.



On September 29, President Maia Sandu declared at the Moldova-Germany Bilateral Forum that the Republic of Moldova wants to attract as many foreign investors as possible to the country and that it wants the state to be a partner of businessmen. "The state of the Republic of Moldova wants to be the partner of businessmen, not their guardian," said the head of state. According to the president, Moldova offers more opportunities for the business environment and now is the opportunity to capitalize on them together. In turn, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said he had found a well-established German business community in Moldova. He said he has the approval of the federal government for development cooperation resources of about ten million euros, through which Germany wants to give a boost to the reforms initiated by Maia Sandu. Germany remains one of the most important partners of the Republic of Moldova, ranking third as volume of trade, exceeding in the first half of the year the amount of 341 million dollars. More than 400 economic agents with German capital operate in Moldova.

Transnistria at the crossroads: present and future forecasts



Transnistria has got into public attention in recent months, following a series of recent events related to the small secessionist region across the Dniester. First of all, it is about the ban imposed by Ukraine on cars with Transnistrian numbers to run on its territory from September 1. Then the success of the Sheriff Tiraspol football team that makes no secret of supporting

the separatist regime in Tiraspol and the region's independence in several announcements placed on the club's website. Last but not least, Russia's organization of a record number of polling stations - 27 in the Transnistrian region for the recent elections to the Moscow State Duma - despite the protests, is really poorly formulated by the Moldovan diplomacy.

While the traffic ban in Ukraine and the elections for the State Duma seem to be in line with the political realities in the region, the image success of Tiraspol through football is a premiere. One that comes to fill the accounts of the Sheriff holding, a monopolistic trust that has monopolized the business environment in the region. It is run by two controversial figures - Viktor Gusan ▶

► and Ylia Kazmalii - both former Russian KGB employees and today - successful business entrepreneurs across Europe.

The football success took even the separatist leaders from Tiraspol by surprise, but this is tailor-made given the presidential elections in the separatist region. The current separatist leader, Vadim Krasnoselski, has already announced his intention to run for a new 'presidential' term.

While Tiraspol is in a happy moment when it comes to its image, the same cannot be said about the Government in Chisinau. With regard to the Ukraine's mobility bans on Transnistrian cars, the Chisinau executive seemed rather incoherent. On a verbal level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Reintegration Bureau seemed rather dissonant on this subject.

While the Reintegration Bureau lobbied for the Moldovan Foreign Office to make diligence in Kiev to extend the possibility of Transnistrian cars to drive in Ukraine, the Moldovan diplomacy was rather refractory to perform such tasks. Likewise, the public communication on this episode was quite cumbersome, which left the impression of an amateurism. The general impression was that the Reintegration Office is fighting more for Tiraspol's interests than Tiraspol itself. And in the end, the ban remained in force.

This can be referred to as the first negative episode of the current government, and in the area of Transnistrian conflict settlement, unfortunately, such events can repeat quite regularly in the absence of a strategy and a concrete vision of the steps to be taken. It remains to be seen what the future holds for us in this extremely complicated case that has been stagnant for three decades.

Moscow-Tiraspol political-electoral cleavage, roadmap for Donbass

Mihai Isac, political analyst and journalist „Karadeniz Press“



The smooth running of the State Duma elections in Transnistria is another step in the process of absorbing both banks of the Dniester into the so-called “Rusky Mir” (Russian World). Forced elections took place both in the Donbas area and the Crimean Peninsula, as well as in the separatist republics of Georgia.

The lack of a harsher reaction by the Chisinau authorities has been criticized by part of civil society and political class. This diplomatic non-combat on the issue of polling stations for the Russian parliamentary or presidential elections has characterized the entire period of independence of the Republic of Moldova.

The situation in Transnistria is a matter of concern for the Ukrainian authorities due to the actions of the Russian side. Moscow has had several attempts to force the federalization of the Republic of Moldova over the past 30 years. The Kremlin's efforts have intensified following the events in Ukraine over the past seven years. Any form of successful federalization of the

Republic of Moldova will be used to force the Kiev hand on the Donbas issue. The Kozak plan ghost has periodically haunted the political scene in the former Soviet republic.

The recent visit of the Tiraspol leader, Vadim Krasnoselski, to Moscow only confirms the main role that Russia is playing in supporting the Transnistrian region. The media on the left bank of the Dniester reported that the Transnistrian leader, Vadim Krasnoselski, had a meeting with the deputy of the Russian Presidential Administration, Dmitri Kozak, with whom he discussed the prospects of the negotiations between Chisinau and the left bank of the Dniester.

“Special attention was paid during

the meeting to the negotiation process between Transnistria and the Republic of Moldova. Russia is a permanent participant in this process. Dmitri Kozak is very well acquainted with the history of the negotiations and the current state of affairs. The two have shared opinions on the current situation and the prospects of activating the dialogue to solve the accumulated problems”, writes the press service from Tiraspol. The two spoke about the implementation of the “Berlin plus” package and the need to convene a large meeting in the ‘5 + 2’ format this year.

Another issue addressed was the provision of Sputnik-V vaccine to Transnistria, a serum that was used politically by the Tiraspol regime and pro-Russian forces in the Republic of Moldova.

Votes for the United Russia

No less than 59,233 residents of the Transnistrian region holders of Russian passports have voted in the elections for the State Duma of the Russian Federation, according to data published in Tiraspol after the closure of the 27 polling stations. Most of the leaders of the Tiraspol regime were also among the voters, including deputies, ministers, but also President Vadim Krasnoselski.

The United Russia received 45,263 votes, about 76.42%. In the previous parliamentary elections, the ruling party obtained about 83% of the votes of the Transnistrians with Russian citizenship. The Liberal Democratic Party, led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, received 3,635 votes

(6.14%) and the Communist Party - another 3,022 votes (5.1%). Both parties have a constant presence on the regional political scene, their affiliates supporting Transnistria's independence and eventual integration into the Russian Federation.

The chairperson of the Moscow Central Electoral Commission, Ella Panfilova, announced that the United Russia had obtained a constitutional majority. The Moscow media reported that a total of eight parties will be represented in the State Duma.

In the previous elections, in 2016, more than 56,000 people voted in the Transnistrian region. In the 2018 presidential elections in Russia, almost 74,000 citizens voted. Back then Russia reported 220,000 citizens in the Transnistrian region.

As a symbol of Transnistria's membership in the Russian electoral space, the polling stations in the region were assigned to several electoral districts of the Russian Federation. The polling stations in Camenca were assigned to the Saratov region, Râbnîța to Lipetsk, Grigoriopol to Voronezh, Bender to Kaliningrad, Dubasari to Irkutsk, etc.

The election campaign of the Russian deputies in the region went smoothly. The deputies Artiom Turov and Serghei Chijov stood out through their declarations of love for the people of Transnistria. The latter said that “we love Transnistrians very much, because we believe that here, to a certain extent, is the heart of Russia.”

Donbas and Caucasus, Russian electoral realms

As in the Transnistrian separatist region of the Republic of Moldova, in the Donbas region of Ukraine, more than 150,000 people with Russian citizenship voted in the elections for the State Duma (lower house of the federal parliament).

Ukrainian media reported that Ukrainians with Russian citizenship in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions were transported free of charge by hundreds of buses and trains to the Russian region of Rostov-on-Don, located near the border with Ukraine, to vote.

There are numerous photos and videos on social networks with buses full of people waving the Russian flag. In addition, the Russian citizens residing in territories controlled by separatist rebels in Donbas were able to vote online in nearly 400 “computer centres.”

On the other hand, in the Abkhazia region about 13,000 people voted at the nine polling stations. Russian authorities estimate that in the region with 254,000 inhabitants there are 200,000 Russian citizens. The Georgian authorities protested against the opening of polling stations, but to no avail.

About 11,000 Russian citizens voted in South Ossetia, including 3,500 soldiers from the Russian contingent deployed in the region. The sections in that area were assigned to the Cita district. The Russian Federation recognized the independence of

Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, following the Russian-Georgian war that summer.

Late reactions

The Moldovan authorities have mentioned they have informed the Russian side that there would be no impediments in the organization of elections in the localities under the control of the Moldovan constitutional authorities, but not in the Transnistrian region.

“The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration regrets that, despite the position consistently expressed by the Moldovan authorities, the Russian side has acted in a manner that does not correspond to the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and the bilateral legal framework,” the statement said. The Moldovan Foreign Office announced that it has asked the Russian side to refrain from opening the 27 polling stations in the localities in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, including given the impossibility of ensuring the necessary security conditions for the elections.

No state other than Russia has ever opened polling stations in the separatist region of the Republic of Moldova. The Chisinau authorities also failed to open polling stations on the left bank of the Dniester for national elections. On the territory controlled by the constitutional authorities, Moscow opened one

polling station in Chisinau, Comrat and Balti.

Presidential ambitions

The massive support of the Tiraspol authorities for stimulating the turnout can also be explained by the ambition of the local leader, Vadim Krasnoselski, to obtain a new mandate as head of the unrecognized Transnistrian Moldovan Republic.

On the eve of the Russian parliamentary elections, Krasnoselski urged people on the left bank of the Dniester to vote in the elections because “despite all the difficulties, Russia does not forget Transnistria and helps it.” He officially announced on Sunday, September 12, in a festive setting in the city of Tighina, where local authorities organized festivities in honour of the Russian prince of Novgorod, Aleksandr Nevski, that he will run for president in the December 12 elections in Transnistria. However, the result of these elections is predictable, since Krasnoselski has managed, in recent years, to eliminate all possible competitors from the regional political scene. Explaining his decision to “run”, Krasnoselski said that during his term, Transnistria became “more beautiful, more comfortable, more modern, managing to preserve the heritage of its ancestors.”

“You don't have to stop halfway; you just have to go forward. I

consider it my duty to continue what I started. I decided to run for president, because I feel responsible for the things initiated and for their successful continuation”, Krasnoselski wrote on his Telegram account.

Transnistrian electoral phalanx

The presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova in 2016 and 2020, as well as the parliamentary elections in recent years have fully shown the ability to mobilize the Transnistrian electorate. Numerous press materials and investigations showed the involvement of certain officials of the local administrations or the Sheriff company. In order to allow the Transnistrian voters to go to the polling stations open for them, during the pandemic, the Tiraspol authorities lifted any quarantine measure. This scenario was repeated both in the presidential elections in the fall of 2020 and in the parliamentary elections from 11 July 2021.

Only international pressure and the exemplary mobilization of the diaspora have managed to nullify this electoral advantage of the pro-Russian forces in the Republic of Moldova. An important role was also played by the mobilization of the media and civil society, which monitored the organized movement of Transnistrian voters to the polling stations on the territory controlled by the constitutional authorities.

Editorial

Transnistria, a bunch of unresolved issues

The Transnistrian case has currently accumulated a series of unresolved issues that risk degenerating at any time. In the last two years, discussions in the established '5 + 2' format, but also the important bilateral talks between Chisinau and Tiraspol, have been completely absent. The main reasons were the pandemic, but also the lack of political will displayed by Chisinau and Tiraspol. The last meeting was in Bratislava in 2019, so the one scheduled for November 2021 in Stockholm will have a very busy schedule.

In a recent interview to the Russian agency RIA Novosti, the separatist leader in Tiraspol, Vadim Krasnoselski, spoke in a rather ambiguous language about what could happen next in the Transnistrian issue. On the one hand, Krasnoselski spoke of the need to resolve burning issues in the socio-economic sphere, as a basic condition for moving the negotiations to the political basket, and on the other hand, just after a few questions, he turned 180 degrees. More specifically, he talked about the imminent implementation of the results of the local referendum in the region from 2006, namely the annexation of Transnistria to the Russian Federation. Such twisted messages not only convey inconsistency, but inevitably lead to a lack of trust between the parties.

If Tiraspol talks about transforming Transnistria into a federal subject of Russia, the question is how can Ukraine not act restrictively on it? How can we talk about a Russian island with thousands of Russian soldiers stationed between two states such as the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine that have openly expressed their desire to join the European Union?

Blockade and victims

During the pandemic, the Transnistrian leaders have unilaterally decided to establish about 40 check points that further restricted access to the region. Moreover, they have almost isolated the Moldovan villages under the



**Editorial by Madalin Necsutu, journalist,
Balkan Insight Correspondent**

control of Chisinau on the left bank of the Dniester, which has created a real humanitarian crisis there.

However, although they can register cars with neutral numbers to travel internationally, residents and economic agents carrying out freight and passengers have not rushed to do so. When Ukraine decided to stop perpetuation of this situation and not to admit cars with Transnistrian numbers after about two years in which the Transnistrians had all the time in the world to reregister, Tiraspol accused Kiev of blockade. Moreover, Krasnoselski tried his best to touch the feelings, saying that the Transnistrian region also includes about 100,000 Ukrainians who will be affected by Ukraine's measure.

That is why Tiraspol sees an eventual Russian intervention as a solution to unblock the situation.

The separatist leader Vadim Krasnoselski also saw no solution to the destruction or evacuation of ammunition from Cobasna. He was rather concerned about a possible impact on the environment following the destruction, and not about the real danger of a catastrophe if the old ammunition depot in Cobasna blew up completely. In fact, such accidents have been common in recent years in Russia. Deposits of old Soviet ammunition exploded in August 2019 in the Krasnoyarsk region of Russia, an incident resulting in deaths and injuries, and in October 2020, a warehouse with about 75,000 tons of ammunition exploded in the Ryazan region, leading to the evacuation of 2,000 people from the neighbouring villages. In fact, Cobasna is only four kilometres away from the nearest town in Ukraine, and a possible accident could affect this country without any doubt.

Football as a soft power tool

What Tiraspol hasn't succeeded through classical diplomacy for about three decades, despite all the support from the Moscow, it succeeded through the so-called 'football paradiplomacy', a term that defines Russia's goals achieved

through proxy. After the surprising victory of the Sheriff Tiraspol against the legendary Real Madrid, the Transnistrian separatist region, though temporarily, has been placed on the world map. All the eyes on the planet stayed focused on this football team and many viewers were able to find out, as headlined by the largest sports daily in Spain – ‘Marca’ - that in the Champions League groups is playing a ‘countryless team’.

However, the world's newspapers did also small investigations to find out what was behind this success and wrote about smuggling, money laundering and a de facto proxy-controlled region of Russia, about the reality that no Moldovan is part of the first 11 players and that, in fact, this team represents the Sheriff holding controlled by the local oligarch, Viktor Gușan.

But we are only one third on the Sheriff's way in this competition, after the team played two of the at least six matches scheduled in this group phase. Calculations on paper show that only now, on the accounts of the Sheriff's Club, will enter a guaranteed minimum of over 21 million euros -legal money from UEFA. In fact, the profits will not stop here, and getting past the fourth-round phase can mean exceeding the threshold of 30 million euros. To these gains will be added the future transfers of some players who stood out in this competition and whose market value has substantially increased. Sheriff has been selling players for millions of euros for years, without benefits, however, for the Moldovan state or sport.

The Tiraspol Sheriff's Club has made no secret of its support to the Transnistrian separatism. The politics has gone hand in hand with football, just as the Sheriff holding has openly supported the ruling party ‘Obnovlenie’ and Vadim Krasnoselski, who has worked for this holding the past.

Krasnoselski has announced that he will run for a new term as leader of the secessionist region in December, and the football success will go to his electoral account through ‘an image transfer’. It remains to be seen how the image opportunities will be used by the Transnistrian leaders in the coming weeks when the Real Madrid or Internazionale Milano will arrive in Tiraspol to play on the Sheriff's Stadium.

Sheriff Tiraspol is now repeating a recipe already patented by the Russian football, trying for more than 20 years ‘soft power’ image blows as is the case of Chelsea London, bought in 2003 by the Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, that won several continental trophies. Likewise, Gazprom has been the main

sponsor of the Champions League for years, or Moscow which invested 10 billion USD to host the 2018 World Cup.

What can Chisinau do?

One tool can Chisinau use is taxation of businesses on the left bank of the Dniester, including the money from the Sheriff Tiraspol club which is affiliated to the Moldovan Football Federation and does not comply with the taxation rules of the Republic of Moldova as other clubs do. Moldova can also profit from the closure or at least obstruction of an important smuggling channel to the port of Odessa, together with Kiev's decision to stop Transnistrian cars.

The story of ‘football diplomacy’, started by former Prime Minister Vlad Filat about a decade ago, has proved ineffective. Moreover, it strengthened the corrupt relations between the politicians of the two banks of the Dniester. The meetings back then turned out to be more of disreputable business practices than solving important issues. In fact, the tax exemptions by Chisinau are but financial oxygen balloons for the survival of the Transnistrian entity.

What Chisinau should achieve first and foremost is to connect to the European energy system as soon as possible, not so much in the area of natural gas as in the area of electricity. By buying electricity produced in Cuciurgan from Russian gas unpaid by Transnistria for 15 years and with a debt of seven billion USD, Chisinau is only prolonging the failure to resolve the Transnistrian case blocked by Tiraspol and Russia in order to prevent Chisinau from moving forward on the European path.

On the other hand, Russia will do everything in its power to obstruct Moldova's energy connection to Europe, and the Transnistrian issue will never be resolved by Moscow's will or initiative. De facto, putting it all out there, Moscow has no interest in solving this problem. It's not playing to its advantage, and the scenario of Transnistria's negotiation for a hypothetical greater advantage in the negotiations with the West is already an outdated hypothesis leading to nowhere.

Transnistria is today only a source of perpetual problems and less of a solution, and Chisinau should at some point take over the reins of this problem, especially in the economic and banking area, and settle accounts in this never-ending story from the perspective of classical negotiations. Of course, the risks have to be calculated rather than just taken, and the steps can be small but firm.

Russia should be encouraged to understand the imminence of its decision to withdraw from Transnistria and of the increasing costs internationally and bilaterally

Igor Munteanu, political analyst and former diplomat

The former diplomat and politician, Igor Munteanu, gave us an interview in which he analysed the latest developments in the Transnistrian settlement issue. I have discussed with him about the recent speech of President Maia Sandu at the UN, the record number of polling stations opened by Russia on the occasion of the Russian State Duma elections, the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria and the regional security threats posed by their presence in the region, but also about the implications of the “football paradiplomacy” given the success of the Sheriff Tiraspol football team in the Champions League. We are inviting you to read about this in the following lines:

■ How do you assess the speech of President Maia Sandu at the UN? She mentioned about the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria, however, there are also critical voices among analysts who refer to a ‘soft’ position of the Republic of Moldova on the Transnistrian settlement issue. How do you assess the position vis-à-vis Russia?

■ I can say the speech was quite balanced with regard to the development agenda, the foundations of the goals for sustainable development.

From this point of view, the Republic of Moldova depends on the international assistance and is interested that it takes into account the major challenges facing the Republic of Moldova related to the pandemic and the cash flows due to the globalized economy. President Maia Sandu has underlined the storage of



fabulous reserves of money withdrawn from the economies of small and large states in offshore areas, which are beyond any democratic control and systems of measuring and monitoring public finances.

From this point of view, I think the speech went well. It also covered the 14 principles referred to by Antonio Guterres in his speech on the results and challenges that the UN should expect. He said that we are like sleepwalkers going to the abyss because the extremely great challenges of the pandemic are not fully understood and articulated by the world powers. And a number of other aspects that the President referred to have conferred a sober character to the speech.

Regarding the security threats, no doubt there have been tackled some well-known things repeatedly mentioned by the Moldovan diplomats, namely that there can be no lasting solution

to the Transnistrian conflict without unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops and that, in the future, the Republic of Moldova will remain firm on its positions. Namely, there can be no subterfuge to which the Russian Federation appealed, by which it wanted to assign to its military forces a role of security guarantee for this region.

The Russian forces represent the reason, the cause and most of the problem existing in the Republic of Moldova related to the constitutional bodies that cannot control the internationally recognized sovereign territory.

What was missing in President Maia Sandu’s speech was proposals as to the mechanism by which Russia could be stimulated to understand the imminence of its decision to withdraw and of the increasing costs internationally and bilaterally for the Russian Federation in order not to preserve its unilateral decisions.

Moscow's abuses in the Transnistrian region

■ **How do you assess the fact that Russia has opened a record number of polling stations for the recent Russian parliamentary elections and the position of Moldovan authorities on this issue?**

■ Some of these decisions also took place against the background of the elections in the Russian Duma, when the opening of the 27 polling stations on the left bank of the Dniester and the other polling stations [in the Republic of Moldova] took place outside the diplomatic and existing political relations between the two states - the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova.

This was because the messages sent have been probably trivially neutral. Russia could not see any costs or possible losses for itself in the notification received. It opened polling stations, allocated diplomatic resources, and organized, through transportation and stimulation, the massive turnout of more than 74,000 voters in the past [Russia's 2019 presidential elections]. In 2021, they were just over 59,000 voters.

Another thing missing from President Maia Sandu's speech was a concrete reference to the proposal made several times by civil society and even by some Moldovan diplomats regarding the replacement of the existing peacekeeping mission in a militarized trilateral format without any control over the standards applied as a result of the Ceasefire Agreement of July 21, 1992. Namely the actual proposal from the Republic of Moldova to introduce a civilian mission, thus the demilitarization of peacekeepers. This affects the responsibility for this on the part of a respectable organization such as the UN.

If there had been a request in this speech from a UN member state to the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to present this position to the Security Council or to the UN General Assembly on the

appropriateness of introducing a civilian mission in the Republic of Moldova, the positive effects would have surely been multiplied. The Republic of Moldova has certainly many allies, many states that would be in favour of such a decision. The current format is frozen and toxic.

Knowing all these things, the speech obviously lacked an essential element. A reference to the regional cooperation on security issues - Georgia, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Romania - would have probably been necessary as the security threats emanating from the Transnistrian region are not unique. They cover a much wider territory than that of the Republic of Moldova and are part of a series of sub-regional threats related to the Black Sea, where there have been annexations of territory, where they have impermissibly consolidated offensive military capabilities contrary to international treaties of control over conventional forces. I am referring here to the Crimean Peninsula. Obviously, these threats cannot be neglected or singled out. President Maia Sandu could have made a very clear and principled reference to the mechanisms of international cooperation in order to highlight clearer solutions to address these constraints.

Poor reactions to old problems

■ **The latest developments in the Transnistrian case related to banning the cars with Transnistrian plates have left room for interpretation, namely the position of Chisinau that had asked Kiev not to apply the ban. How do you assess the latest negotiations on the part of Chisinau?**

■ In one word - disappointing. It is the current government that asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and other authorities to suspend the entry into force of a long-negotiated agreement between the two states. I am referring to the first letter sent through diplomatic channels on 14 January 2021, immediately after the first meeting of Presidents Maia

Sandu and Volodymyr Zelensky, and the second attempt, which was fortunately blocked by the Ukrainian side, to suspend the entry into force of this unexpected action to regulate international traffic by restricting the right of movement of cars with unrecognized transport numbers.

The Republic of Moldova has made every effort to provide car owners with the necessary space and time, as well as related tools for them to comply with its national legislation. Any references to the fact that the citizens did not have time are obsolete and by no means represent the real picture of things. From my point of view, the slowdown in the process of reporting or complying with these legislative issues is only related to the desire of separatist leaders to maintain and preserve some levers of influence over the regulatory process. Any kind of compliance steps would mean losing ground and financial means that they cannot do without. And we, the people of Chisinau, should choose very clearly between practicing the elements of sovereignty to which the Constitution obliges us and practicing the game at both ends and thus favouring the interests of the separatist regime.

■ **Right after announcing the results of the July 11 parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova, the Russian MP Leonid Kalashnikov said that Moscow can activate, I'm quoting the 'Transnistrian factor' if the Moldovan authorities adopt an anti-Russian position. What exactly did the Russian official mean by activating the 'Transnistrian factor'?**

■ The statements of the deputies of the State Duma of Russia are always extremely politicized and maintain a certain atmosphere of presenting the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation as a feudal relationship, a relationship between senior and vassal. From this point of view, this statement does not even have to be analysed in terms of the rigors of international law.

It is an expression of the geopolitical dogmatism that some Russian politicians are inoculated with, some of whom have not accepted for a moment that the Russian Federation is now dealing with independent states. By nullifying the independence of states to make decisions in accordance with their own interests, they seek to demonstrate that they have sufficient strength to intervene and punish the governments of states that do not conform to its interests and will.

The deputy Kalashnikov continues the belligerent style of Dmitry Rogozin who, in his last term as Representative of the President of Russia on economic and trade relations, said that the Russian army could get any time to Bucharest if the Romanian authorities decided to block the air navigation between the Russian Federation and Moldova, as he was then under international sanctions imposed on several Russian officials. Such statements are inflaming every time and show very clearly that the Russian Federation would like to deal only from a position of strength. This is not a positive thing for the credibility of the Russian state.

'The paradiplomacy of football as a model of 'soft power'

■ **What could we expect from Tiraspol regarding the promotion of this 'football paradiplomacy' given the success of the Sheriff Tiraspol team in the Champions League? Does this team represent the Republic of Moldova in this competition or is it rather an image opportunity for the separatist regime in Tiraspol?**

■ From the very beginning, the Sheriff Group's huge investments in the Tiraspol stadium from its obscure sources meant an investment in cultural diplomacy. It also meant an application of the 'soft power' proposed and strongly recommended by the Russian Federation, which is insisting on persuading by hard and less hard means, through conviction and imposition, that the Republic of Moldova recognize Transnistria as a subject of a potential

federation, not taking the responsibility for recognizing it as it did in the case of the unrecognized regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The central reason for continuing this policy is that it would like to transfer the financing of this regime to obviously other entities, keeping its role of using the existing structures in a future state formula, without being blamed (as in the case of Crimea) and 'taking the lead' by controlling the space of the common future.

Regarding this 'football miracle' of Transnistria, we can see that none of the players on the field are citizens of the Republic of Moldova. They are not even residents of the region. From this point of view, there is absolutely no connection between the Moldovan football, which has its own federation and organization, and this team from Tiraspol which represents any other region of the globe but the Republic of Moldova.

Should we rejoice or grieve over this result? First of all, we are disappointed because the associations administering this beautiful sport has never conditioned normatively the evolutions of the sport practiced in Transnistria and obviously were either corrupted or co-opted to the geopolitical games that the Russian Federation is making through this sport. The Republic of Moldova has absolutely no reason to be proud that this team is playing in a famous competition because no player belongs to it and obviously has no image benefit.

■ **Will this participation of the Sheriff Tiraspol in the Campions League help the separatist leader from Tiraspol, Vadim Krasnoselski, who has just announced his candidacy for a new term at the helm of the separatist region? Will this football success be used in the election race in Tiraspol?**

■ Football has nothing to do with domestic political matches in Transnistria. It is the stomach that votes for the

selected elites to be part of this separatist regime, the stomach meaning the one who controls the incomes and wages of the population and helps to obtain the economic benefits.

For the most part, they are generated by unpaid flows of Russian gas that represent the oxygen bubble of the separatist regime. As long as the Russian Federation sponsors the separatist regime, Moscow will make sure to invest regardless of the popular vote. By naming the election circuit of the Transnistrian elites as elections, we would be making a big mistake, because what we are having on the left bank of the Dniester is a pseudo-democracy, a 'paradiplomacy' and at the same time a mockery of basic standards, of democratic rigor through representation. Football has nothing to do with it, and here I should get back to a matter of principle.

The Republic of Moldova offers unlimited access for producers on the left bank of the Dniester to European markets. The only signatory of the Free Trade Agreement with the EU is the Republic of Moldova and not Transnistria. Tiraspol is taking advantage of the escalation of conflict situations in order to persuade Brussels to keep the benefits it enjoys and obtain unilateral concessions from Chisinau.

In the pandemic situation, Transnistria closed any access to its region, receiving humanitarian aid, but did not allow the doctors from Chisinau to check medical institutions or provide first aid. Also, the ambulances that were supposed to provide medical assistance in localities on the left bank of the Dniester, under the jurisdiction of Chisinau, were stopped and the doctors were arrested, without Chisinau having an adequate and exemplary reaction.

As long as Transnistrians impose force without paying the costs for their impunity, progress on the conflict settlement will be minimal or completely absent.

Expert Opinion

The '5 + 2' format - why will its revival be very difficult?

Editorial by Angela Grămadă, director of Experts for Security and Global Affairs Association (ESGA) from Bucharest, Romania

The change of leadership in the Republic of Moldova (presidential elections in November 2020 and early parliamentary elections on July 11, 2021) brings about the need to reflect on a wide range of problems or dilemmas that this country has been facing for almost 30 years and for which previous governments have failed to identify solutions. The Transnistrian problem is just one of them.

Although many politicians speak of European integration as a foreign policy objective or national interest, they are often reminded, in one form or another, that without a viable solution, the status of a member country of the European Union may not be obtained.

Getting back to the change of government and, therefore, to the decision-making process paradigm with regard to the Transnistrian conflict, it is important to highlight the way in which the new leadership relates to the negotiation format of the conflict. In several public interventions, President Maia Sandu has stated that the '5+2' negotiation format is the framework in which discussions should continue in order to identify solutions to the problems faced by the residents of the left bank of the Dniester.

Officials are very careful that their speeches do not lead to public dissent. It is not about lack of courage and attempts to spare Russia because the Republic of Moldova is energy and also economically dependent on Moscow. It is about assuming a balanced discourse, which does not lead to waves of protests. The aim is therefore to avoid criticism primarily internally that can

affect the governance act. The current political elite of the country did not talk too much in the election campaigns about Transnistria, but promised reforms, fair justice, and welfare.

Only occasionally can we highlight an inclusion of the electorate from the left bank of the Dniester in the speeches of various political actors during the electoral campaigns. Moreover, all previous attempts to 'resolve' the conflict have been limited to the promotion of schemes and interests of representatives of decision-makers, and this issue has remained impregnated in the retina of society.

Too few politicians have reflected on concrete attempts to ensure and protect the rights and freedoms of the residents of the Transnistrian region and of those residing on the territory controlled by the authorities. In April 2009, Vladimir Voronin reacted harshly to the protests and said that the new political crisis had postponed the solution to the Transnistrian conflict indefinitely. And those who followed him, including Igor Dodon, operated in the public space with similar messages. Thus, the country's leadership has always blamed



the citizens for their lack of vision and their own inability to provide solutions.

For the current government, the biggest dilemma or challenge will be to limit the access to 'opportunities and benefits' of the separatist leaders in Tiraspol, but also Russia's interference into the internal affairs of the Republic of Moldova, that is in the decision-making process.

Kiev, more attentive to the Transnistrian case

Another challenge is the inclusion of the residents on the left bank of the Dniester in political, economic, and social processes carried out by the country's leadership, taking responsibility for identifying an optimal solution to the conflict, avoiding dissensions with partners, especially those participating in the '5 + 2' negotiation format, and holding the mediators accountable. Obviously, at the moment it is about Ukraine which is very attentive in assessing not only the security threats on the Transnistrian perimeter that is not controlled by Chisinau, but also

the decision-making in the Republic of Moldova, as it can have a very big impact on the settlement process in the Donbas and Lugansk regions.

The analysis of the '5 + 2' format potential to produce recommendations for different types of problems faced by the residents of the Transnistrian region, but also the solution accepted by all parties involved, which can no longer be re-assessed, starts today from public speeches and new official documents. In their public discourse, the political leaders try to avoid such debates and only randomly mention the issue. This determines experts to use position papers or government programmes. The government programme presented in August 2021 contains two references to the '5 + 2' format:

The first refers to "intensifying the dialogue in the '5 + 2' format, which aims at restoring the state integrity through peaceful, diplomatic negotiations, ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders." The second talks about "the inclusion in the '5 + 2' format negotiations of socio-economic issues, human rights, free movement and political settlement of the conflict".

The first reference is about the interest of the Chisinau authorities to act peacefully, through discussions and negotiations, but respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. There is no deviation from official discourse and domestic law.

Dilemmas with regard to the relationship with Tiraspol and confusing communication

The dilemma in this case is the ability of the Republic of Moldova to cope with the aggressive rhetoric coming from the unrecognized regime in Tiraspol and to communicate to the internal public and partners its own vision on how to intensify the dialogue so that it can lead to a solution given that until now Moldova's position was quite weak in promoting its national security interests and protecting its citizens.

In the second reference of the programme we can see how the new government is trying to timidly propose the debate on the political settlement of the conflict - an aspect aggressively postponed by the separatist leaders in Tiraspol, supported by Moscow.

The revival of the '5 + 2' negotiation format of the Transnistrian conflict will be very difficult, and the latest events that have taken place further discourage citizens' confidence in an optimal solution.

Taking into account the official discourse displayed in the last almost a year, but also what was mentioned in the government programme and previous official documents, the Chisinau authorities must go through a serious self-assessment process. This self-assessment process should include reflections on:

- The ability of decision makers to assume the negotiation process in the interest of their own citizens and with respect for territorial sovereignty and integrity;

- Correct assessment of the internal resources involved in managing the issues that arise in the negotiation process and correct and insistent argumentation of the discussions on the political aspects of the conflict;
- Amending the communication strategy of the Reintegration Bureau, which should be more skilfully coordinated with the other public institutions taking part in the decision-making process;
- Intensify the dialogue with external partners that can provide support for the internationalization of the conflict;
- Evaluation of international platforms and forums, where the Transnistrian issue has been addressed previously, especially of the United Nations, where the Republic of Moldova can capitalize on consistent support if it manages to create cohesion for the solution and not postpone a serious discussion on this issue with the Russian Federation.

In conclusion, the mandate of the current government is quite complex with regard to resolving the Transnistrian conflict. The 'intensification of dialogue' should not be reduced to multiplying the number of meetings with separatist leaders in Tiraspol. It presupposes the ability of the Chisinau authorities to come up with a new vision, increased responsibility and a communication and advocacy strategy that does not allow the separatist authorities in the Transnistrian region to capitalize on moments of hesitation. The discourse should be firm in promoting the territorial integrity and protection of the rights and freedoms of all citizens of the Republic of Moldova.

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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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