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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

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News in Brief



Moldovan diplomacy stated on September 29 that the Republic of Moldova strongly condemns the so-called plebiscites illegally organized by the Russian Federation in the Ukrainian occupied regions of Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk and Luhansk, which constitute a flagrant violation of the fundamental principles of international law. "The Republic of Moldova does not recognize the results of these illegal actions and reiterates its consistent support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders," the statement of the foreign office reads. Also, President Maia Sandu declared that the so-called referenda organized by Russia to annex four regions of Ukraine are fake. "We do not recognize either the referenda or the results of these referenda. We respect as before the territorial integrity of Ukraine within the internationally recognized borders", said the head of state.



Moldovans who also hold Russian citizenship could lose their Moldovan citizenship if they join the Russian army to fight in the war in Ukraine, and those who only have Moldovan citizenship risk harsher sanctions for being mercenaries. The announcement was made by the president Maia Sandu, following the meeting of the Supreme Security Council (CSS). Meeting on Saturday, September 24, the CSS discussed the changes that may occur in the region and in the Republic of Moldova after the statements of the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, regarding the partial military mobilization, the so-called referendums organized in the four Ukrainian territories controlled by Moscow and the use of nuclear weapons. Also, the punishment could be toughened for those who have exclusive citizenship of the Republic of Moldova and choose to fight in Ukraine on the side of Russia.



The government will specify in November how much it will compensate for the increased bills for gas, electricity and heat, the Minister of Labour and Social Protection, Marcel Spătarî, announced on Wednesday, September 21. Household consumers are to be grouped into four categories of "energy vulnerability", from very high to low. The information system that will allow the accumulation of the data needed to fit into one of these categories should become functional at the beginning of October. According to the minister, the registration of consumers in the information system will take maximum five minutes and will be done individually on the compensatii.gov.md online platform or with the help of social workers and librarians. In the application for the registration in the information system, consumers will have to include, among other things, personal data and the average monthly income obtained in the last three months. The vulnerability category will be estimated automatically.

The 'Macron - Von der Leyen Plan' and its implications for Moldova's accession to the EU



President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, together with the French president Emmanuel Macron

The European Political Community project launched by France in May and supported in September by the European Commission raises a series of question marks for the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, but also the countries of the Western Balkans, which are knocking at the doors of the European Union in this context of war in the eastern vicinity of the Union.

The plans of the Europeans are rather vague about how this idea will unfold and whether the final result would be the European integration of these states based on the previously known model or a deepening of their relationship with Brussels, a kind of Eastern Partnership 2.0 or maybe another variant.

Nothing is clear, which is why both Chisinau

and Kyiv are waiting for more clarity. In the states that want to join the EU, there are fears that, by forming the Community, the membership could be postponed indefinitely.

The latest speech on this topic by the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, did not provide the answers that the capitals in the Eastern neighbourhood and

► in the Balkans were expecting to the question of what exactly this European Political Community means, including for the European Commission.

Previously, Macron formulated quite vaguely, when launching the idea on May 9, that this project is a platform for political dialogue and cooperation that will not replace the European Union's enlargement policy. At the end of August, the Chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz, had also spoken of a Union with "36 countries".

For the time being, the diplomats in Chisinau and Kyiv have accepted politely any kind of plan to expand or deepen the political-economic relations with the EU, however, they have openly stated that they want full membership as the ultimate goal of the reform process and EU rapprochement.

The 'stage benefits' are important for the two capitals - Chisinau and Kyiv - which received the status of a candidate country for EU accession on June 23, especially on the eve of the cold season. Reforms must continue to be a priority, but on the other hand, there must be

some predictability in the sense of formulating a clearer time horizon and expectations.

In 2023, some of the aspiring countries will enter the next phase and could open negotiation chapters with the EU. Ukraine and Moldova are credited with the first chance, but that also depends on the developments of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the political and economic crises at the European and world levels. The situation is still volatile and full of many unknowns.

Madalin Necshutsu

We are doing our homework and moving forward with the reforms to bring the standards closer to the European requirements

The deputy of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), Adrian Balutel, gave an interview for the foreign policy bulletin of FES/APE in which he spoke about the European path of the Republic of Moldova in the light of the Brussels latest plans. More specifically, the EU is ready to go ahead with the plan to enlarge the EU with new states by creating the "European Political Community", a plan proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron on May 9. What this means for the Republic of Moldova and what the benefits for the country are in the opinion of the PAS deputy, read in the following interview:

■ The head of the EC, Ursula von der Leyen, made a very important statement on September 14 regarding the enlargement of the EU in one form or another. It seems that the EU will go on with the enlargement through the European Political Community, proposed by the leader of the Elysee



Palace, Emmanuel Macron, on May 9. What does this mean for the Republic of Moldova?

■ It was a historic speech. It is the first time since the last wave of EU enlargement [Croatia in 2013 – ed.] that an EU leader speaks so strongly about the European Union's enlargement policy. This is gratifying and gives us hope. The EU expansion options are just as good for us and we are interested in all formats.

The format of the "extended political union" presented by French president Macron is an option that we see as complementary. At the current stage this deserves to be discussed, yet, our objective is the full integration as a member state of the European Union. That's the ultimate goal and that's what we're aiming for. Meanwhile, in the process of joining the EU, we are obviously ready and willing to opt for other actions related to greater integration: access to the free

market, a closer political cohesion and connection with the EU, the accession of the Republic of Moldova to various platforms, projects, and initiatives. These things are all welcome as they are all for the benefit of the Moldovan citizens.

Ursula von der Leyen's speech is a memorable one from the perspective that she recognizes and says it clearly that these states - the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, the countries of the Western Balkans - are the future and the European Union is not complete without them. This is the recognition that we, as a country, can be part of the EU.

■ **How much has this war changed the EU's vision of Europe? The last country to join the EU block was Croatia, in 2013. Is the Russian invasion a signal for the EU that it needs to expand its membership in one way or another, and how can the Republic of Moldova be part of this change? Is it ready for this leap to be part of the European family?**

■ In the last 10 years, the EU has been shaken by several crises that, from many perspectives, have affected the trust between political leaders. They have also created a lot of tension between the EU member-states and the institutions in Brussels. However, these have not jeopardized the effectiveness of the EU and its ability to deliver for citizens.

The war in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian Federation, brought the European Union together. It created a solidarity in the face of danger. All EU countries understood that, with all existing problems and shortcomings, the EU is not just an institution and an international organization, but a set of values and a community based on ideas about how countries can live together in peace and prosperity.

Around this idea, after the war, the European countries united in the face of possible threats. It was also understood that the capacity to transform a country for the better - we are talking here about Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and the Balkan countries – can only be strengthened as long as they are part of the European Union or deeply connected to the EU.

The EU thus sees the enlargement process as a possibility to stabilize the EU candidate states, which are in fact European, and to extend the positive effects of this unity within the European Union.

Solidarity within the EU and in its proximity

■ **This war has created greater cohesion among the EU states and even NATO. Has Russia somehow achieved the opposite of what it wanted?**

■ If you remember the discussions about the European Union versus the Customs Union, they have not changed now. The choice between the two development models still remains. We just see that, in the meantime, the Customs Union has disappeared and turned into a discussion about an aggressor state - the Russian Federation. On the other side, the EU, with all its problems, has now reasserted itself as a leader, which, in delicate situations, offers help to states in need. They stand in solidarity with the citizens, and the member states stand in solidarity with each other. The EU has become even more of a union of solidarity and values, a fact which stood out in the current situation. This is what Ursula von der Leyen also says, that the EU will prevail anyway in the face of danger and problems. The war created challenges not only for the Republic of Moldova, but also for the European Union.

■ **Is now perhaps the time to settle the Transnistrian issue taxing the goods moving to and from the Transnistrian region, in order to stop this decades-long enrichment of the oligarch clan from Tiraspol which is controlling a good part of the economy of the separatist regime?**

■ There is still war in the neighbouring country. This creates enormous security risks. The aggressor in this war - Russia - has its troops including in the Transnistrian region. Any attempt now to bring back the discussions on the Transnistrian issue involves certain risks.

There will be a window of opportunity in the near future, after the end of this conflict, to reactivate the discussions on the Transnistrian issue. Now, as long as there is war in Ukraine, the main goal is to ensure the security, tranquillity, and peace of the citizens on both banks of the Dniester.

■ **Yet Russia insists on negotiations with Tiraspol. I have also seen the recent statements of the head of Russian diplomacy on this issue. Does Moscow think this 'timing' suits it?**

■ We are following the statements from Moscow and the Transnistrian region. Still, our aim now is to focus on the citizens. We have an extremely complicated winter to go through, and this also applies to the citizens of the Transnistrian region.

The citizens are very worried about the repercussions of the war. In the next period, we must focus and deliver results for the citizens and ensure the best possible and peaceful climate in the Republic of Moldova. I believe that the Transnistrian issue will have a window of opportunity when the war in Ukraine ends.

I believe in the victory of Ukraine and this will lead to a natural resolution of the conflict in a peaceful and diplomatic way.

Backup energy scenarios

■ **What are the plans of the Republic of Moldova in the event of a black scenario in October, when Gazprom could stop the gas supply to the Republic of Moldova? There have been a lot of talks in the last few days about Romania's support, but also about the option of bringing gas from Azerbaijan. Which solution would be closer to reality and why?**

■ Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Spinu has presented three scenarios on how the authorities will act depending on the developments in the energy field: from a normal situation to a partial limitation of gas supplies, and to the cessation of gas supplies from the Russian Federation. All these options have been considered.

For the most part, what the Republic of Moldova will do, regardless of the gas price, will make an effort so that the prices for domestic consumers do not change compared to last winter. I am referring here to the price in the bill, so that the volume of compensation is comparable to what the citizens received last winter, or even more. From the perspective of energy resources, we have a loan from the EBRD for gas reserves in Romania. Lots of electricity generating companies operating on gas are now being modified to be able to operate permanently on fuel oil.

We also launched a project to provide wood to citizens who do not have central heating and gas. There are also discussions with other gas suppliers to diversify the portfolio of companies from which we can purchase gas. It is an extensive complex of measures that are being developed.

There are alternatives for the right bank of the Dniester. The question, in the event of the worst-case scenario, namely the disconnection from gas by the Russian Federation, is how much

this gas will cost. Regardless of how much its delivery cost will be, the Government has resources and ready to provide the citizens and businesses with a package of compensations in the bill, so that the citizens don't feel the burden of the high prices.

We are also striving to get resources throughout the winter, regardless of the gas price, to provide compensation to mitigate these truly exorbitant prices as much as possible. The gas price now is caused by the war in Ukraine, and until the situation gets back to normal, the government will be helping the citizens with compensation measures.

Complementarity and vision

■ **Alongside Macron's French plan for the European Political Community, in late August, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also talked about having "36 states" in the future EU configuration. As we know, France and Germany are the main engines of the EU. Can we say that in both scenarios, either the French or the German, the Republic of Moldova is in a good position?**

■ It is in a very good position. I believe that the French and German scenarios for EU enlargement are complementary. The EU member states understand that both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, after the war, will go through a period for reconstruction. The Republic of Moldova has certain shortcomings, including the Transnistrian issue, as well as the justice reform. These things take a bit of time.

At the same time, a closer political union with these countries can bring certain short-term benefits such as access to the European single market. For instance, an increase in the export quotas to the EU was discussed in the summer of this year. A faster form of integration can ensure full access to the EU market, as the EC president Ursula von der Leyen has said. The

same happens with roaming and many other elements that are not related to strategic aspects, but are very beneficial for citizens.

I think that the format proposed by President Macron is an intermediate one, to be able to ensure in a very short period of time access for countries that aspire to become members of the EU to certain benefits.

The openness to expand the EU comes from all corners of the Union, and this is supported by everyone. It is rather a helping hand that will integrate the economic and social elements of the candidate countries aspiring to a future membership status of the European Union.

Another benefit is the liberalization of transport, which has already happened here. So, these are very practical aspects for citizens. After that, space will be left for solving more difficult issues related to justice, frozen conflicts, stabilization of the political climate. Finally, accession to the EU will follow.

That's how I see things, I don't see the two scenarios, French and German, as somewhat contradictory. It is important that the statements from the EU materialize into very concrete things and benefits for the Moldovan citizens.

After obtaining the status of the EU candidate country, we have a specific goal, namely to solve the nine recommendations that came from the EU after this important moment of June 23.

We are doing our homework, we are moving forward with the reforms aimed at bringing the standards of the Republic of Moldova closer to the European requirements. This gives us hope that when the accession options are discussed, we will be ready. And we will do it regardless of the situation!

■ **Thank you!**

Editorial

We have no other historical development option than European integration

Praga devine, pe 6 octombrie, centrul vieții politice a Europei. Șefii statelor europene vor discuta, într-un format care se reunește pentru prima dată, despre războiul din Ucraina, despre provocările de securitate, situația economiei europene și iarna grea care urmează. Intenția Chișinăului este de a folosi platforma pentru a cere sprijin pentru perspectiva europeană a țării, dar și solidaritate în domeniul energiei și în depășirea problemelor economice și sociale.

On October 6, Prague becomes the centre of Europe's political life. European heads of state will discuss, in a format that meets for the first time, the war in Ukraine, security challenges, the state of the European economy and the difficult winter ahead. Chisinau's intention is to use the platform to ask for support for the European perspective of the country, but also for solidarity in the field of energy and in overcoming economic and social problems.

The new pan-European initiative, the European Political Community, brings together in the capital of the Czech Republic, the country that holds the rotating presidency of the EU, 44 heads of state located geographically in Europe. At least that many were invited by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and



the absolute majority confirmed their attendance. Only Russia, because of the war it started against Ukraine, and Belarus, as a penalty for the direct support of the Kremlin in aggression against Ukraine but also for the suppression of the opposition and the anti-democratic slippages after the presidential elections in the summer of the year 2020, have remained outside the new European arrangement.

In the new political and security context in Europe, the initiative launched in May by French President Emmanuel Macron is seen by European leaders as a symbol of European unity in the face of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, but also in the face of successive waves of current

and future crises - from the energy, to the economic and security - which have their origin in Moscow's actions. Another challenge on top of the agenda is the migrant crisis: Russia's aggression has brought more than 4.2 million Ukrainians to European countries, and the recently announced mobilization in Russia has brought into question the status the Russian citizens may or may not receive in the European countries where they have been fleeing fearing the mobilization.

Initial suspicions

In a first phase, Macron's initiative, launched on May 9 in a speech about the future of Europe, was treated with suspicion, especially by the states in the

east of the continent, that saw in it an attempt to postpone the EU accession of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia, and to create a kind of “waiting room” that would replace the accession to the EU and where the respective countries would be placed together with the states of the Western Balkans and the UK that has recently exited EU.

But later, including during the visits that he had in June to Chisinau and Kyiv, Macron gave assurances that the initiative of the European Political Community does not replace the process of accession of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to the EU, but “opens as many ways as possible to rapid solidarity and concrete cooperation”. In addition to political and security cooperation, Macron said the new initiative could target cooperation in the areas of energy, transport, infrastructure investment or the movement of people.

The Republic of Moldova is represented at the European Political Community by President Maia Sandu. From the start, Chisinau saw in the new European initiative an opportunity to promote its interests on a continental scale. The head of state stated, since the launch of the Community, that “this is not an alternative for Moldova’s European path, but a complementary initiative that will help Moldova in the process of European integration”. “We want to strengthen the partnership with the EU in the political and security fields. For us, joining the EU is the strategic option to remain part of the free world, especially in the current security context,” declared Maia Sandu.

Support platform

The intention of Chisinau is therefore to use the platform to ask for support for the European perspective of the country, but also for solidarity in terms of energy and in overcoming economic and social problems. The Chisinau authorities are aware that European support is crucial

for the Moldovan society, strongly marked by inflation and price increases, to maintain support for the country’s European integration vector. Moreover, these vulnerabilities have also begun to be massively exploited by the pro-Eastern opposition to accentuate the wave of discontent and protests in society and direct it not only against the current government, but also against the European vector of the Republic of Moldova.

The European Commissioner for Budget and Administration, Johannes Hahn, recently stated that the Republic of Moldova is treated as a member of the EU family and will not be left alone in the face of difficulties. “We will do everything to help you. We feel this obligation towards you. You are a candidate state for accession and you must become a member with full rights”, said Hahn in Chisinau just a week before the meeting in Prague.

“Obtaining the status of candidate state for accession is the most important achievement of the Republic of Moldova this year. This statute allows us to anchor the Republic of Moldova in an economic, political and value space where we can develop in the right direction - European integration is our national project”, declared Maia Sandu at one point.

The Republic of Moldova currently benefits from probably the greatest support it has ever had from the West and the European Union. The “Champion of Lost Chances” has a real chance this time to pass the point of no return in its European course and cease to be the “grey zone” or “buffer zone” between Russia’s imperialist interests and the civilized world, an area where they have maintained during the decades of independence the obscure interests and corruption schemes of an opaque and compromised political class.

Historic opportunity not to be missed

Will the Republic of Moldova capitalize on the historic opportunity or will it fail again? It will all depend on how the government manages the incredibly complicated time we are going through, and very importantly, how it communicates these efforts to the society. It will also depend on the ability of the judiciary to reform itself and resolve the big corruption cases in such a way that the criminals stay in prison and do not play politics to take over power. It will also depend on how the media will understand its mission to inform objectively, but also on the degree of maturity of society and the demand for normality that should come from the people.

Ukraine’s resistance to the Russian invasion has changed the reality in the region and now we are in a situation where including geopolitics favours the European path of the Republic of Moldova. We may already be at the point where we have no other historical development option than European integration. But this is due not so much to societal effort and political class cohesion as to geography. Geography also shows us that if we derail this time and bring dubious and anti-European political forces to power, we are risking that the entire Republic of Moldova will turn into a kind of Transnistria of Europe - an area isolated from civilization, kept in poverty and abuse, which refuses development and tries to return to the past.

We are going through a difficult period in which, in the context of the war started by Russia, we are discussing things unimaginable a few months ago. If the most demented and apocalyptic scenarios are avoided, the dream of our generation – joining the European Union – could become the everyday reality of future generations.

Lina Grau

We should understand that crisis situations bring also opportunities

The political analyst of IDIS “Viitorul”, Ion Tabarța, has analysed for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter the implications of the “European Political Community” plan for the countries aspiring to join the EU in the light of the latest developments on the European political scene. He also explained why the Republic of Moldova is in a favourable position and how it should continue to play the European card in order to ensure the next steps towards the final goal of joining the EU. We invite you to follow in the following lines the discussion with the political analyst, Ion Tabarța:

■ **What does the ‘European Political Community’ for the enlargement of the EU, proposed by the French President Emmanuel Macron and more recently supported by the European Commission, mean for the Republic of Moldova?**

■ Yes, the European Commission also agrees with this plan. On October 6, in Prague, the first meeting of this ‘European Political Community’ will take place, in which the 27 EU states will participate, as well as the candidate states, including the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

For the Republic of Moldova, but also for Ukraine, this means that the EU has changed its paradigm regarding the enlargement as a process. It was well



known that until this spring the EU had accepted, though with reservations, a certain expansion in the area of the Western Balkans, but in no case in the eastern direction, that of the former republics of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Partnership states which want such a perspective.

We have to say it openly that the EU did not accept this perspective until recently for various reasons related to the accession and the requirements for that, but also because of the Russian factor. For us, the fact that the EU has changed its paradigm, in the context of geopolitical events, opens up this perspective as an argument against the rhetoric of the Russian propaganda which was telling us: “Where are you going, because you will not be accepted in the EU and no one will grant you the candidate status?”

Russia used to tell us that Moldova cannot be part of the EU, because it has no place there, and that in fact its place is next to Russia, because it belongs to that space. The Russian propaganda has now changed its narrative according to which the candidate status means nothing anyway, because there are countries that have had this status for decades and have not yet become members of the EU. The example of Turkey was brought up, but Turkey is a completely different case. Thus, we cannot speak of similarities with the Republic of Moldova or Ukraine.

Increased cohesion, Moscow bet on the wrong horse

■ **This war has created a greater cohesion among the EU and NATO states. Can we say that Russia has**

achieved exactly the opposite of what Russia set out to do at the start of the invasion of Ukraine?

■ That is true, the EU has shown a cohesion like never before in its history. For the past decade and perhaps longer, the EU has been sceptical of any enlargement. After the enlargement waves of 2004 and 2007, the EU has become reluctant to further enlargement. The failure to adopt a common Constitution speaks for that too. States such as the Netherlands or Denmark have stopped the processes of deepening the integrationist process within the EU. A series of crises has fuelled this Euroskepticism, so that each EU state has tried to find solutions on its own. We remember the economic crisis in Greece or the migration crisis. Then Brexit happened with the UK leaving the EU.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic the member states went it alone, and this has revealed new vulnerabilities of the European project, namely that, from a social point of view, the states are not at all integrated.

It is now being discussed that there should be an EU-wide health data space, so that if someone has a medical problem in one state, his/her medical history can be accessed in another state where, for example, the patient is treated. More precisely, it is about a common social system.

Yet, the war in Ukraine has challenged this cohesion. The world was horrified and shocked by this brutal Russian military intervention in Ukraine. And here we are no longer talking about a

single state, but about an offensive of autocracies, authoritarian and dictatorial regimes against the free world.

The last invasion of the reactionary and undemocratic world happened probably after the First World War, in the interwar period, with the rise of dictatorial regimes almost everywhere in Europe. Germany and Italy were conclusive examples in this respect. Even France and Great Britain ran into problems of democracy then.

Now, indeed, the free world has seen that the EU architecture is actually in jeopardy as the entire international order since World War II is based on certain rules. This refers also to the United Nations, with all its operational problems. What Putin has done, namely the revision of the current world order, has in fact trampled all the norms of international law built up throughout the post-war period.

There are also separate, albeit isolated, voices in the EU, such as Hungary. However, these voices have to conform to the majority.

Solutions to the Transnistrian issue

■ **Is there now a window of opportunity for resolving the Transnistrian conflict? There are two ideas, namely that now it would be a good time to solve it, and at the same time, the other part of the current government is suggesting the conflict is going to resolve by itself after the end of the conflict in Ukraine. What is your opinion from the perspective of the**

European path of the Republic of Moldova?

■ We should understand that crisis situations always create certain opportunities. Whether it goes for loss or gain. For example, during the First World War, Romania was reduced to a third of its national territory and at the end of the war it came out with an almost doubled territory and a population from around 7 to 14 million.

We should now act in a very intelligent way. The developments on the front exclude the involvement of the army in military operations and at the same time a military danger to the Republic of Moldova. The fighting is taking place relatively far from the Odesa region and there are no indications that the front would approach Moldova. There are no talks about the involvement of the Transnistrian and Russian army in the Transnistrian region either.

Probably those who are primarily interested in not getting involved in the military operations are the Transnistrians themselves, because the Ukrainian army has now the potential to destroy in a short period of time all the military forces there. This does not mean by any way we should use the moment to somehow intervene militarily or ask for the help of Ukraine to intervene militarily in Transnistria.

However, we should be firm in our actions. It is clear that those in Transnistria and Gagauzia do not have that strong connection with Moscow. In relation to the Gagauz region, I think we need to be stricter. In relation to all the people who act against the state of the Republic of Moldova,

through various actions of separatism or provocations, the law enforcement institutions should act firmly, but in compliance with the law.

As for the Transnistrian region, we should use the momentum. They are practically isolated. In other news, in the event of a possible gas crisis, for instance, if we are disconnected from the gas by Russian Federation, this would create huge socio-economic problems in the Republic of Moldova. However, in that case, we will have natural gas from the West, precisely from Romania, albeit at higher price. And it is clear that those in the Transnistrian region will not have natural gas without the approval of the Republic of Moldova and without paying in advance or at least paying a certain price for it. And then all this isolation of theirs and distance from Russia, which will no longer be able to help them, could create certain conditions for the Transnistrian region, including through the economy, to be connected to Chisinau.

In the above-mentioned scenario, however, we will have to exclude the schemes, the interests, because the Transnistrian region represents a business opportunity for some people in Chisinau and Tiraspol, and even for some regional elites of Odessa. In this situation, we have to make it a condition for the people in Tiraspol in order to get them back to the legal and political space of Chisinau and subordinate them to the Moldovan state.

Need for political consensus

■ **Whether it is about Macron's plan or the German plan, through which**

the EU would have 36 states, can we say that Moldova has to gain from this?

■ The Republic of Moldova is part of these scenarios. All these crises and decisions highlighted the fact that the Republic of Moldova, in terms of its decision-making mechanism, should revise the way it's functioning. There was also talk about the constitutive acts of the EU so that decisions are no longer taken only by absolute vote of all member states.

I believe that such an absolute decision must remain with the EU, but only on key issues. On all other issues, the decision should be made by majority vote. This EU mechanism will bring stability. Currently, the mechanism is cumbersome and often slow to react.

Moldova is in the books and this is obvious. Recently, the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, went to New York in the USA, together with the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, and other European heads of state. The fact that Maia Sandu sat next to the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, shows that Moldova is regarded positively as a state. The current government, with all its internal problems, has a good image. I don't want to make counterfactual history, but can you imagine how would have now been the situation if Igor Dodon had been at the helm of the country? He would probably not have gone to New York, but to Shanghai instead, with Putin.

The biggest problem in the Republic of Moldova is that we lack cohesion at the level of

society regarding the development vector. For example, in Romania there was the 1995 Snagov Agreement and all the parties reached a consensus with regard to the European integration. There was also an attempt to reach a common denominator in the Republic of Moldova in 2012-2013, at a meeting in Ghidighici, which failed. Unfortunately, in our country there is no societal consensus with regard to the European orientation, and precisely because of this the European integration process is not an irreversible one.

Certain pro-Russian political forces speculate politically taking advantage of this division of society. Their electoral messages aim at dividing the society, because this situation suits them and brings them votes. This guarantees them political and electoral capital. And Igor Dodon is the symbolic expression of this fact.

Just to remind you, immediately after Dodon's election as president in 2016, he declared he would be 'everyone's president'. Instead, he was a geopolitical president and, unfortunately, many of the so-called geopolitical parties and leaders divide society. Precisely because of this we cannot speak of the irreversible course of the European integration process. If in a scenario where the current pro-European forces lose power and pro-Russian ones come to power, the European course of the Republic of Moldova will stagnate at best, or we can even talk about a different development course.

■ **Thank you!**

Expert opinion

European Political Community – the new pan-European “club” against Eurasian-type authoritarianism

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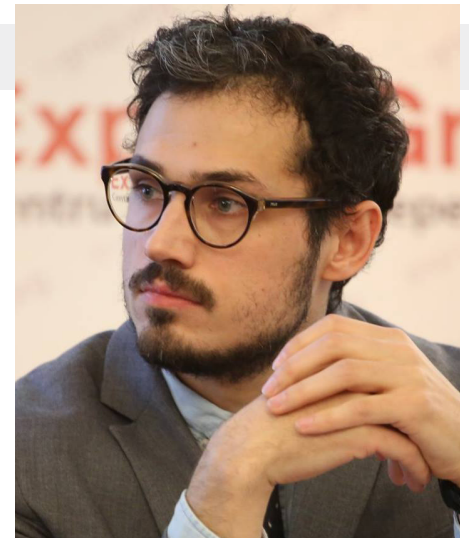
On 6 October 2022, the leaders of 44 European states are expected in Prague for the first meeting of the European Political Community. The political initiative to launch this Community belongs to French President Emmanuel Macron. In May, in Strasbourg, in front of the European Parliament, in his speech dedicated to Europe Day, the French leader proposed the establishment of a new European community, which would correspond to the geopolitical crossroads facing the European continent. In Macron’s vision, the European Political Community is to create a space conducive to „political cooperation” between European nations that share similar democratic visions. Macron’s proposal took into account Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and the new wave of applications for EU membership from Eastern Partnership states. Macron’s proposal was therefore based on vague parameters and an ambitious geopolitical vision.

Reflections on such a Community are not something completely new. A similar idea was advanced in the past by French President François Mitterrand in 1989, but also by various European intellectuals since then. In broader terms, the given Community corresponds to the intention of drawing the geopolitical borders to where the EU is willing to exert its political influence in order to increase the degree of interconnection, stability and security, more on a continental scale than a regional one. The materialization of this idea represents a kind of geopolitical-civilizational awakening of the pan-European political elites in the face of the need to protect and promote European-style democracy against the Eurasian (Putinist-Russian

type) expansionist and militaristic authoritarianism.

European Nations’ „Club”

For the sake of simplification, it can be stated that the modernized version of the Community, promoted by Macron, involves the creation of a kind of “club” of European democracies. As it explained by the Jacques Delors Institute, which is behind this concept, depending on the geopolitical preferences of the participating countries, joining the Community represents a first step towards EU membership or an alternative to membership. The initiative is still in its making. It is known, for now, that the objectives pursued by the Community



consist in (1) setting up a platform for dialogue and political cooperation, and (2) strengthening security, stability, and prosperity.

The *modus operandi* of this Community is currently limited to biannual meetings, with the participation of the leaders of the EU states and several blocks of states whose relations and level of integration with the EU differ from case to case. The first meeting of the Community is held under the EU Presidency of the Czech Republic. Discussions will focus on topics related to security (peace and security) and the energy crisis (energy, environment and the economic situation). After the joint meeting, the participating states will be able to continue the dialogue in bilateral meetings.

Table. Composition of the European Political Community

No. of category	Category of participants	Participating states
1	UE (27)	Member states
2	European Economic Area (3)	Island, Norway, Lichtenstein
3	Comprehensive bilateral agreements (1)	Switzerland
4	Candidate states (7)	<i>Western Balkans:</i> Albania, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Serbia Turkey <i>Eastern partnership:</i> Ukraine, Moldova
5	Potential candidates (3)	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Georgia
6	Eastern Partnership (2)	Armenia, Azerbaijan
7	Former member states (1)	United Kingdom

Source: Author's compilation with reference to www.consilium.europa.eu

In total, the EU has invited 44 states to join the European Political Community (See Table below). The composition is very diverse and many states have problems of democratic inadequacy, disputed borders and even open conflicts or military threats. The huge difference between the seven categories of participants will require enormous mediation efforts from the EU, which will be represented by the President of the European Commission (Ursula von der Leyen) and the President of the EU Council (Charles Michel).

Given the support offered to Russia in the military attack against Ukraine, but also the unprecedented persecution of the opposition and civil society following the falsified presidential elections in 2020, followed by sanctions, Belarus is disconnected from initiatives dedicated to countries with which the EU maintains or wishes to establish strategic dialogue. Russia's fascist authoritarianism under Vladimir Putin vis-à-vis Ukraine and the hybrid war waged against the EU (and other NATO members) have resulted in the freezing of bilateral relations. Moreover, the Russian leadership has

made it clear that Russia's strategic future lies in Eurasian integration and deepening cooperation with Asia.

Last but not least, only states that are located in Europe or are perceived as part of the European continent are invited to take part of this Community. Therefore, the initiative does not target the states in the southern neighbourhood of the EU, where states with democratic aspirations (Tunisia) or with Western-type democratic institutions (Israel) can also be identified. Central Asian states are also not included, including states that are distancing themselves from Russia and trying to intensify their dialogue with the EU (Kazakhstan). This aspect proves the exclusive geographical character of the European Political Community, which is limited to a smaller number of states, where the EU wants to consolidate and/or increase its presence.

Between suspicions and support

Initially, the idea of establishing a new Community was treated with

skepticism both within the EU and among the states in (pre-) accession negotiations or those with potential candidate status. Emmanuel Macron has been suspected of wanting to replace the EU's enlargement policy with a less ambitious relationship format for states with explicit European aspirations and perspectives. However, the Community's proposal has surfaced during the period when the EU was sending the questionnaires for candidate country status to Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia (in May). At the same time, there were obstacles to the opening of accession negotiations in some parts of the Western Balkans. That is why, in the first phase, expectations towards Macron's initiative were affected by political reluctance, largely justified.

After the granting of the EU candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, including the confirmation of the European perspective for Georgia, on June 23, the reluctant opinion towards the European Political Community began to soften. Subsequently, the opening of accession negotiations for Albania and North Macedonia, at the end of July, reinforced positive attitudes towards the initiative. Today, both old and new candidates have realized that the accession process depends on their capacity for internal transformation and that of the EU for further enlargement. So, the European Political Community represents an additional platform for interaction, rather than a replacement of the European perspective already validated by the EU. At the same time, it is understood that all the states participating in the new Community must determine their relations with Russia. From a political point of view, the deepening of strategic relations with Russia (under Vladimir Putin's regime) is incompatible with the European geopolitical vector.

Benefits for Moldova

Moldova was among the first countries to send positive signals about Macron's initiative. The French leader mentioned the European Political Community in his discussions with President Maia Sandu, with whom Paris has established close political contacts. The French support in advocating for the Moldova's EU candidate status has made it clear that the idea of the Community, articulated by Macron, aims at something completely different than replacing the EU enlargement to the East. Moldova is not in a situation where it can be selective about such opportunities to promote its national interest on a continental scale.

From a geopolitical point of view, Moldova's participation in this

initiative strengthens the European vector of the country. This allows for the consolidation of political energy on the EU pre-accession processes, initiated after the granting of candidate country status in June. Presence within the Community facilitates high-level political discussions with leaders of other countries with pan-European visions, which allows for regular networking without resorting to pan-European party ties. Until now, Maia Sandu had additional meetings with European leaders facilitated by the European People's Party. The political cooperation platform provided by the Community creates opportunities for current and future country leaders, regardless of the pan-European parties they belong to. Also, joining the Community may be an additional step towards abandoning the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), whose

image has been shaken by the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

On a practical level, in addition to the prestige of the country, joining the Community provides opportunities for promoting Moldova as a destination for foreign investments, including for identifying solutions for cross-border problems. In high-level bilateral and multilateral discussions, domestic issues can be internationalized, which are exploited by external actors with hostile agendas, such as Russia. Thus, the Moldovan side can, regularly, inform and keep European political decision-makers informed about the progress and deficiencies (crises) the country is facing. Finally, the diversification of external political dialogue channels between Moldova and other states with European aspirations is beneficial for regional stability and security.

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