

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

NEWSLETTER

MONTHLY BULLETIN • MAY 2023 • NR.5 (207)

Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

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News in Brief



The President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, addressed the "European Moldova" National Assembly in Chisinau on May 21, saying in Romanian that "Europe is Moldova. Moldova is Europe". Metsola joined the president of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, at the rally of the European Assembly of Moldova, which brought together around 80,000 people who support the European path of the Republic of Moldova. "We are here to confirm your European choice, to support your choice to join to the European Union as a member state, to emphasize that your rights deserve the same protection that EU membership offers other citizens of the Union," said Metsola. "We believe in the same values, we share the same vision and our future is one that will be shared. Together we can face anything. Because the Republic of Moldova is part of our European family. And this family will always be with you," added the head of the European Parliament.



The head of state, Maia Sandu, declared on May 21, at the "European Moldova" National Assembly, that the citizens of the Republic of Moldova are European by vocation and called for popular support for integration into the European Union. "Europe is more than politics, it is a dream that must come true. Our people should live in peace and prosperity. It is the choice of our people. There is work to be done for the whole society, but it is also a way that will ensure the future of our children", declared Maia Sandu. She argued this desire for the Republic of Moldova to join the EU member states from the perspective of a better future for Moldovan children and openly criticized Russia for sabotaging this collective European desire of the Moldovan citizens expressed through a democratic vote. "What the future of our children will look like years from now depends on us today. No one can stand in our way if we want to. The master in our house is the people. The Republic of Moldova must be European. Moldovans must be European in documents as well. They tried to divide us, to blackmail us, they wanted us to be dependent, to freeze, but we resisted. We persevered against all odds. We remained a democratic country that deserves its future in the EU", she added.



On May 22, the Speaker of the Chisinau Parliament, Igor Grosu, addressed a request to the Government demanding the initiation of the procedure for the withdrawal of the Republic of Moldova from the Agreement on the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Previously, in the meeting of May 19, the Permanent Bureau of the Parliament decided to initiate the procedure of denunciation of the Convention regarding the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The decision was supported by the majority of the members of the Permanent Bureau. Igor Grosu proposed that this topic be included on the agenda of the May 25 and 26 meetings. Then, the speaker announced that a series of agreements related to the CIS are no longer useful since the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the post-Soviet countries are not respected, and in the context of the war in Ukraine, the situation of the Republic of Moldova has worsened. Russia became aggressive and initiated a series of hostile actions against the Republic of Moldova and the pro-European government in Chisinau, Grosu also stated.

The EPC Summit – an opportunity for the European integration of Republic of Moldova



Moldovan President Maia Sandu, together with the President of the European Council, Charles Michel.
Photo source: Moldovan Presidency

The Republic of Moldova is on the eve of the most important event in its history after independence from the Soviet Union, namely the hosting of the European Political Community Summit. About 50 heads of state and government, plus European officials of the highest level, will come to Chisinau for the first time.

The chosen location is a special and symbolic one - a winery - a signal that Chisinau officials want to show another facet of the Republic of Moldova, not just of the Soviet-style administrative buildings that European leaders are used to when they visit Chisinau.

However, the most important thing about this Summit is that for one day all eyes of the European mass media will be focused on the Republic of Moldova and its desire to breathe the air of the great European family. It will be hard work to convince the European leaders that the Republic of

► Moldova must receive a positive report this autumn so that in December the European Council once again offers its vote of confidence so that the Republic of Moldova can open accession negotiations by chapters with the European Union.

The Republic of Moldova does not have the experience of hosting such large-scale events, which will represent an administrative test for the state apparatus. The organizational outcome is almost as important as the topics on the summit agenda. Three big issues will be discussed: security and defence, energy and the diversification of its supply sources, and last but not least, connectivity. The Republic of Moldova needs road and railway infrastructure,

energy connections, and services integrated with the European Union.

When it comes to energy, Republic of Moldova has as its primary target its inclusion in the EU's energy procurement package – gas and energy. In the medium term, Chisinau must accelerate the interconnections with the EU via Romania both by developing the capacity of the Iași-Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline and through new high-voltage lines with Romania. Last but not least, there is a need for Moldova to hold consistent bilateral discussions on the energy issue with countries such as Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan for the diversity of energy supply sources.

Last but not least, the European leaders will come to the scene to be able to

observe security problems faced by the Republic of Moldova - the separatist region and the latent Gagauz autonomy, both cloaked by the malignant influence of Russia that can destabilize the country. It is also important for the West to help modernize the National Army, especially by equipping it with Western-style weapons that are more modern and interoperable with those used by Western armies.

All these aspects are particularly important topics that the Republic of Moldova has the chance to discuss with all the Western leaders gathered together and create future opportunities on all these vital dimensions for it.

Madalin Necsutu

The presence of European leaders at the EPC Summit is an extraordinary display of courage, determination and unity

The State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MAEIE), Stela Leuca, gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter in which we discussed about what has been happening behind the scenes while preparing for the upcoming European Political Community (EPC) Summit to be held in Chisinau on June 1. We talked about preparations, agenda, expectations, and especially about the steps that the Republic of Moldova is currently taking for the European integration. Read in the following lines how important it is for the Moldovan authorities to host the biggest international event in its 32-year history:

■ Mrs. Leuca, we are fast approaching the EPC Summit, the biggest event organized by the Republic of Moldova that will bring together about 50 heads



of state and government. What does this mean for the Republic of Moldova?

■ In this context, the most important thing for the Republic of Moldova is the vote of confidence given to us for the organization of this event by the initiators of this summit, but also by all the participants. At the level of the European Union, but also in the wider European space, it is realized that the Republic of Moldova can play a role in the region in the geopolitical context given Russia's war against Ukraine at our borders.

What we do with this vote of confidence is just as important to those outside as it is to those at home. To outsiders, I think it's important to make sure we maintain that good opinion of ourselves and live up to expectations. We must show that we play this role that exceeds the borders of the Republic of Moldova.

Equally important is finding commonalities that benefit us at home as well. We are talking about internal benefits that will serve us in the long term. If we organize this event well, everyone will appreciate it and they will see that we have the desire, the ability, and that we know how to go beyond just those personal interests.

Working against the clock

■ **How do you feel about the organization, since such an event requires a lot of preparation, from logistics to matters related to public order and security?**

■ We are working hard to organize the summit, and the people involved in this process have mobilized exceptionally. We have many working groups with representatives from various institutions, whether we are talking about ministers, state secretaries, or officials from various departments who are responsible for small parts such as protocol, logistics,

accreditations, routes, etc. It works with the accuracy of a clock.

It's a lot of work and it's a team effort. Inter-institutionally we need to coordinate a lot of details, whether it's press accreditation or how we transport guests from the airport to the hotel, they work impressively well.

The special part of these preparations is that everyone is result-oriented. They all work because they see things moving and being resolved on agreed terms. This motivates the people engaged in this process who work with dedication. We start the organizational meetings at four in the afternoon and we don't know when they will end. It usually ends only when we have solved the topics on the agenda.

Clear agenda with precise topics

■ **What topics will the Republic of Moldova promote with priority on the agenda of this Summit, but also bilaterally on the sidelines of the event, in the discussions that the representatives of Chisinau will have with the guests who will arrive in Chisinau?**

■ I would like to believe that this Summit is not of the Republic of Moldova, but of the European Political Community (EPC). All topics required prior detailed discussions and were agreed upon by all summit participants. More precisely, on June 1, we will have 50 state leaders and several European institutions in Chisinau. Representatives of each leader participated in a very long series of discussions and negotiations to agree on the common topics.

We started the discussions from more than 20 topics. We had a group discussion at the country level and came up with ideas for topics that are important for us and for the states in the region and Europe. Then, those topics

were consulted with the representatives of the leaders of the countries that will come to Chisinau. We talked about who and what will be promoted on the agenda of the discussions. Thus, in the end, out of more than 20 topics we came up to three: energy, security, and connectivity, which were agreed by all the representatives of the leaders.

What is important now is what we as a country do with these topics. When we talk about energy, it means much more than gas and electricity. It also means renewable energy potential, investments in the field, environment, interconnectivity, common gas procurement platform, etc.

As for connectivity, this does not only mean roads and bridges, but also roaming, educational or academic exchange programmes, or exchange programmes between public institutions.

We have tried to formulate theses that will serve us as starting points in those discussions. At roundtables, leaders will gather and discuss, with the freedom to choose their roundtable and discussion topic. At each table there will be a discussion leader or facilitator on the selected topic.

Our interest as a country is to get some results from those conversations that we can turn into benefits. For example, if we talk about energy, we are interested in the common European gas procurement platform. We are interested in being active members and buying bundled gas with all of Europe. We will further use the results of the discussions at the summit in the diplomatic efforts of interaction, either with the European institutions or with each of the countries present at the summit. This is the logic of this enormous logistical, political, but also financial effort.

Important administrative test

■ **Can the event at the Mimi Castle be considered a test before the EU**

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that Moldova has the administrative capacity to organize such an event in the perspective of hosting such high-level meetings in the future?

We certainly see it that way because, if we are to talk about European integration and the commitment to achieving the nine recommendations of the European Commission, we need to work on improving the administrative capacity to implement the European reform agenda.

Therefore, we are paying attention to these aspects, because the Republic of Moldova, in the near future, will not have enough money or people to be able to hire massively to support this effort. In this sense, we need to rethink our way of working and find options to do things better and improve the interaction between institutions.

We certainly view this Summit organization also as an effort to test our administrative capacity. If everything goes well for us, we will definitely use this experience in our interaction as a reference.

It is very important to have processes and people to rethink everything. We are result-oriented. We already know that we cannot get the number of people we would like to work on the day of the Summit, so we are trying to find the optimal method to achieve that result.

■ What is the symbolism of the fact that the leaders of the European democratic world, as well as their partners, come only a few tens of kilometres away from the front in Ukraine, where the leadership in Kiev is preparing a counteroffensive against the Russian invaders?

■ The European leaders make a very conscious decision to come to Chisinau, a short distance from the front line. They are equally aware of the limitations on

security and defense of the Republic of Moldova.

The presence of European leaders at the EPC Summit is an extraordinary display of courage, determination, and unity. The message conveyed is that yes, “we know we are close, but we are united and we are many”. Their presence in Chisinau says a lot for Ukraine, but also for us as a country trying to find alternative ways to cooperate with our development partners to ensure that everything will be fine.

Media and promotion

■ Several hundred journalists will be present at the event, who will write or disseminate thousands of stories from here in the Republic of Moldova. How important is this event, including from the point of view of the country’s image and media coverage, and what are your expectations in this regard?

■ We can’t wait for them to come. We are expecting a very large number of foreign journalists who will come to Chisinau. The simple idea that we will host journalists from around 40-50 countries is incredible for Moldova. It is an opportunity for us to tell our story, who we are and what our aspirations are. It is absolutely fascinating.

What is equally important is that the Moldovan journalists will be together in the same space with the foreign journalists. I think it will be a unique experience for them too to be with established journalists from all over the world. I do not think that many journalists from the Republic of Moldova have had this experience.

We will set up a media centre for the foreign journalists at Mediacor, which will provide a space where they can interact and carry out their work. In addition, we intend to organize several

events in which we will offer journalists the opportunity to interact with people who will inform about the Republic of Moldova, including ministers, thus promoting our country.

We are interested in investments, energy sources, and European integration. We want to answer all questions, as I imagine there will be many journalists writing on political and geopolitical topics. We want to make sure they get to talk to people who can inform them and answer their questions.

■ Could this event somehow represent an advantage for the Republic of Moldova, in the context in which we know very well that intense diplomatic efforts are being made so that in December the Republic of Moldova will again receive a positive vote from the European Council and enter the next stage of the relationship with the EU, namely the opening of chapter-by-chapter accession negotiations with the EU?

■ A joint effort will be needed here. We certainly intend to do this, because we believe that the fact that we are organizing this summit and how we intend to use this event for discussions will further benefit the Republic of Moldova.

There is a few countries that are still undecided and they need to be convinced with arguments. However, we believe that it is important that those who have certain doubts all come to the same space and have a common conversation.

We are glad to have all the leaders together because, for example, it is hard to believe that certain European leaders will meet under various circumstances to discuss about the Republic of Moldova. It is good that we have everyone together in Chisinau!

■ Thank you!

The Republic of Moldova is facing the most serious tests on the way to the EU

Before the summit of the European Political Community on June 1, the Republic of Moldova has managed to create a moment with a strong symbolic weight, after about 80,000 people gathered in the Great National Assembly Square in Chisinau to express their support for the idea of integration of Republic of Moldova in the great European family and becoming in the near future one of the new member states of the European Union.

Although paradoxically Chisinau finds itself in the most difficult security context since 1992, it enjoys unprecedented sympathy in Brussels. This is not caused alone by the charismatic figure of President Maia Sandu, but especially by the citizens who impressed Europe through their exemplary mobilization and support for the almost 100,000 Ukrainian refugees who fleeing the war chose to stay on the territory of the Republic of Moldova .

That was the turning point that determined a completely different approach from Brussels and put Chisinau on the axis of future European integration by opening an unprecedented window of opportunity.

On May 21, the Republic of Moldova and the EU sat together in the center of Chisinau, and the symbolism of the two speeches - that of President Maia Sandu and that of President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola - showed precisely the very firm intentions of the EU to welcome the Republic of Moldova in the EU following the reforms of Chisinau in the field of justice and strengthening the state's resilience, especially when it comes to the administrative capacities and the rule of law.



Reforms are applied with varying degrees of speed of implementation, but the most important thing is that there is political will in Chisinau to achieve the objectives listed above. More important than ticking off certain requirements is changing the way citizens think. The pro-European demonstration on May 21 was not only one of the largest of its kind in the last decade in the Republic of Moldova, but it brought to the center of Chisinau people with a sincere will to adhere to European values, who, through the decency of their behaviour throughout duration of the event, revealed a high degree of European civic sense.

Unchaining energies and strong messages to Brussels

The Pro-European sympathizers probably also felt the need to unleash their energies, after for almost a year they had to see every Sunday anti-government protests paid for by

the pro-Russian parties that want to create the impression of a general dissatisfaction in the country with the current pro-European power in Chisinau.

There was a need for the European leaders to convince themselves through this demonstration that the Moldovan citizens willing to integrate into the European Union are the majority and that it is not only the ruling party pushing the European agenda, but this is a genuine desire of the Moldovan people first of all.

Guided by polls and the erosion of governance scores as a result of multiple crises in recent years that have hit the Republic of Moldova head-on, there were certain question marks from the Western partners whether the Moldovan people's support of the European idea is still relevant. The presence of around 80,000 people in the centre of Chisinau and several tens of thousands

more in all the capitals and big cities of Europe showed without any doubt the adherence to the European ideas and values that keep the European dream of the Moldovans just as alive.

The citizens went through extremely difficult moments, when their gas and energy bills went up 6-7 times in the last year. However, they realized the fact that the Republic of Moldova received from the West, only in 2022, the amount of about one billion euros, of which almost two thirds were grants. Almost half of those grants - worth about 250 million euros - were used to compensate the price of their bills with people understanding very clearly that the EU is the only solution for a better future of this country. The European realities defeated the Russian propaganda that tried to cancel all those factual elements of the EU's unconditional aid to the Republic of Moldova.

Increasing societal awareness and resilience

The Moldovan citizens have now a higher degree of political and informational literacy and are more rationally and less emotionally aware of the processes regarding the future of the Republic of Moldova. Of course, that doesn't mean that the toxic Russian propaganda and manipulation aren't being produced at high levels. Slowly but surely, the battle for the "hearts and minds" of the people is being won by the European Union as the future development model. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, even the pro-Russian sympathizers understood that the road to Russia from the Republic of Moldova is nothing but a dead end.

However, the European course is not yet irreversible for the Republic of Moldova. Nevertheless, the stabilization of the economic situation will also bring with it a new impulse and certainly an oxygen balloon for the idea of continuing the European path. It will not be easy in

the future either, but the results of the association with the EU for the Republic of Moldova are becoming more and more understood at the level of society, and the perceptions of the role of the EU in the relationship with the Republic of Moldova are starting to improve.

To give an impetus to this phenomenon, there is need for an informational disenchantment of some citizens of the Republic of Moldova who are prisoners of the Russian manipulations and intoxications about what the Republic of Moldova is. This will be a tremendous challenge for years to come, and this also depends on stricter laws and regulations regarding the Russian propaganda and its effects. The Republic of Moldova needs to become more resilient to misinformation, and on the other hand, even if it is not in its character, the European Union should more visibly promote its projects and successes here in the Republic of Moldova.

The preview of a large-scale summit

However, the Republic of Moldova will still have an important test to pass. Moldova will host, on June 1, in Chisinau, the summit of the European Political Community, the largest international event in its history, which will be attended by around 50 heads of state and prime ministers from all EU countries, European Union officials and the closest partners of the EU.

This happens just a few tens of kilometers from the border with Ukraine and the Russian invasion in Ukraine, a fact that has a special symbolism. So the security of these leaders will be the "zero priority" of the organizing authorities in Chisinau, a fact that will constitute an unprecedented challenge for Moldova.

Moldova does not have the total necessary capacity to ensure the security of the world leaders who will

come to Mimi Castel for this summit, but Romania and Ukraine will also intervene here to ensure the security of the airspace of the Republic of Moldova.

The organization of the event itself will be a test to demonstrate the administrative capabilities of the Republic of Moldova to prove to the EU that it can cope with such important tasks. The relationship with the EU will involve similar events in the future that will have to be organized by the Republic of Moldova, and this will also be monitored by the EU. Nevertheless, the Republic of Moldova will have to organize everything impeccably, but above all, to push on the agenda of discussions topics related to its security and defense, some related to energy and energy security, a critical point where the Republic of Moldova still has to do a lot of work in order to get rid of its energy dependence on Russia, which has suffocated the free political decisions from Chisinau for more than three decades. Last but not least, it is about topics related to infrastructure development and interconnection with the EU, both through new roads and bridges, but also through energy interconnection, mobile telephony, and the Internet.

It is a unique opportunity for the Republic of Moldova to be the host of such a meeting of such a magnitude and it depends a lot on the capacity of the Moldovan diplomacy and the other Moldovan officials to be able to push these topics on the official agenda, but also in bilateral discussions with the other states that will be present and that can be sources of energy supply for Chisinau. It remains to be seen how the Moldovan officials will handle this matter and how they will manage to explain their needs to their partners, but especially what promises of help they will manage to get from the leaders of the European free world.

Madalin Necsutu

The advantage of organizing such a summit is far above any other achievements of the Republic of Moldova

The organization of the European Political Community (EPC) Summit in Chisinau, on June 1, is a challenge that will indisputably bring benefits on all levels, says the deputy director of the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), Mihai Mogildea, who gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter. We have talked with the IPRE expert about the citizens' perception of the biggest event in the history of the Republic of Moldova and the expectations from this summit in the areas of security, energy, and the most important thing for the future step in the relationship with the EU - the opening of EU accession negotiations on chapters. We invite you to read the full interview with the expert Mihai Mogildea:

■ On June 1, the Republic of Moldova will host the European Political Community Summit, perhaps the most important event organized in the history of the Republic of Moldova as a state. What is the importance of hosting such a summit?

■ The importance of such an event resides in the presence in Chisinau of a number of 50 leaders of European states who will certainly increase the standing and prestige of our country. I expect this Summit will bring more benefits to the Republic of Moldova. We are talking about a meeting that, from a diplomatic point of view, represents a platform for promoting the strategic interests and priorities of the Republic of Moldova among European countries.

The event will give us the opportunity to promote our objective of European integration and explain to the European



states about the progress we made in the last period, the challenges we have been facing, and the priorities we set for the immediate future, so that our partners understand better how they can support the Republic of Moldova on the European integration path.

■ What topics should Chisinau raise in the discussions with the European leaders who will be present at this event?

■ As far as I know, there will be several topics on the discussion agenda. The first will be about security at the regional level and how the European states can cooperate more effectively from a the security point of view to increase their resilience to external threats, especially from Russia.

A second topic on the agenda will be related to energy security and the response of European states to the states' energy-related challenges.

A third topic will be dedicated to the interconnection between European

countries in several areas such as telecommunications, transport and critical infrastructure that help states to intensify their economic cooperation.

For the Republic of Moldova, all topics are relevant. They are important, because all these areas have recently been affected by several problems that made us rethink the policies, including the security and energy policies, and intensify cooperation with the EU.

Such an event gives us the opportunity to continue the dialogue with countries outside the EU, and more precisely, with those countries with which we have the opportunity to talk less often, but which can help us just as much, especially from the energy point of view, and which also understand what this transition process towards the EU accession entails. Here I am referring to the Balkan countries, but also to the Western non-EU countries such as Great Britain or Norway, which from the point of view of security and energy are important dialogue partners for our country, as well as other countries present at the event.

Administrative test before the EU

■ **Is this summit perhaps also a test for the administrative capacity of the Republic of Moldova, to demonstrate to the EU that our country, with its limited human and administrative resources, can cope with such tasks from the EU as a state aspiring to the EU membership?**

Definitely yes. The organization of such an event involves a great responsibility because logistical preparations and coordination between institutions must be efficient.

The resources that the Republic of Moldova has invested in this summit represent a test for the authorities in the perspective of organizing similar events in the following years and in the perspective of European integration, because then we will have to host such meetings more often.

At the same time, I think this event is important for the society, because after all we are talking about the modernization of several infrastructure networks. We see roads being repaired and railways renovated, etc. The residents of the Bulboaca village, Anenii Noi, will benefit from the current preparations well beyond this summit. At the same time, the event is also important for the people residing in the proximity of the summit location, because hundreds of people from the adjacent localities will be included in the actual preparations. I also saw some economic estimates according to which after hosting such a large number of visitors - about 1,500 - 2,000 people - the Horeca sector could benefit from up to MDL 2 mln in profit.

In addition, I think that attracting a larger number of tourists, in the long term, could be possible as a result of organizing such an event, because more people will hear about the Republic of Moldova in the foreign media. Thousands of articles will probably be written about our country in

just a few days and will reflect not only the problems related to this event, but the entire social and economic situation in the Republic of Moldova, including the locations that will be included in the agenda of this summit.

There are a lot of benefits and advantages both for the people who live in our country and for those who are or will be interested in the Republic of Moldova after this summit.

Between propaganda and reality

■ **The Russian propaganda and some local political actors are trying to push the discussion about the discomfort created by the security measures in the days leading up to the summit, but also about the organization costs that they see. At the same time, the fact is omitted that only in 2022, the EU offered Moldova about EUR 1 bln, most of money being provided as grants. How do you see the comparative situation between the propaganda related to this summit and the factual realities regarding the relationship between the Republic of Moldova and the EU?**

■ The discourse regarding the expenses for the organization of this summit and the criticism brought to the authorities for the decision to invest the money, which according to some media sources would amount to around MDL 60 mln, seem to me unarguable for the simple reason that the benefits obtained from organizing the summit will exceed by far the expenses of the summit.

If we analyze the destination of this money, we will see that most money will be spent on the modernization of infrastructure in this area. This infrastructure will be used by the common people also after the end of the summit.

At the same time, the money that will be invested in the organization of the event will probably be recovered at the

end of the summit given the investments that Moldova may enjoy due to new sources of external assistance from the European countries that will agree with our government new financial assistance packages and new forms of cooperation in the near future as a result of this event.

So I don't think we can compare the costs or investment in organizing the summit and the benefits that we will get from the summit, because there is a clear difference in those benefits.

At the same time, from the political-diplomatic point of view, the advantage of organizing such an event is far above any other achievements that the Republic of Moldova has had in the context of other international discussion formats, because here, in Chisinau, the leaders of all democratic European countries that want to maintain stability on the European continent are going to reunite.

The fact that the Republic of Moldova will be the host of this summit brings about new benefits for the European integration agenda, especially since towards the end of this year, our authorities want to obtain a favourable decision for the opening of accession negotiations, this event having a decisive role in this regard.

Political vote versus concrete achievements

■ **Do we have reasons to be optimistic about the next step in the Moldova-EU relationship in the autumn, namely the opening of chapter negotiations with the EU? Technically speaking, did Chisinau do its homework or are we once again betting more on a political vote for the next stage of the relationship with the EU?**

■ I think we are betting on both. On the one hand, homework is in preparation. We have several areas where we have made more progress, and there are also reforms that are under the process of implementation. Other reforms are a bit lagging behind in producing notable

results, and here I am referring to the justice reform and the fight against corruption.

At the same time, the decision from December 2023, if it is taken following an assessment that the European Commission should publish this autumn as part of the enlargement package, is an eminently political one. This means that diplomatic efforts will matter a lot for the position that European countries will present regarding the case of the Republic of Moldova. Let's not forget that such a political decision was also taken in June last year. Even if many voices did not give us much chance to obtain the status of a candidate country, we saw that this was possible and this was mainly due to the diplomatic efforts invested by the Moldovan officials.

We need such events because, in the conditions in which the Republic of Moldova has a limited diplomatic presence, in which the human resources available within the Foreign Office or other public institutions are limited, we should take advantage of every possibility to promote the case of the European integration of our country and try to form this cohesion among European countries regarding a favorable decision on the opening of accession talks.

■ How symbolic, from the security point of view, is it that these 50 or so European leaders will come just a few tens of kilometers away from the war in Ukraine, especially at a time when Ukraine is preparing a counter-offensive to liberate its territories?

■ Organizing this event a few tens of kilometers from the border of Ukraine, in a country that is currently fragile from the point of view of the defense and security, such as the Republic of Moldova, can contribute to a better understanding among the European countries regarding the urgent need for the Republic of Moldova to be integrated into the EU. Moldovan could benefit from as many

funds and assistance as possible for critical areas such as defense, energy or commerce. This will help our country to avoid new crises that could arise in the near future.

The need to accelerate reforms

■ How much should Moldova accelerate all reforms and the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* in the coming period, because this window of opportunity of the EU that Moldova currently enjoys cannot remain indefinitely open?

■ We should move with fairly quick steps. In April, the Foreign Office sent our contribution for the October report which is going to be published by the EC as part of the enlargement package.

From what was communicated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicu Popescu, we understand that this first contribution will be supplemented with some additions in June of this year on the nine measures that we have to implement by the end of July.

There will probably be some additional reports on the justice reform, pre-vetting and vetting, and other reforms under the process of implementation. There is no much time left for the reforms we have undertaken to implement by the end of July 2023.

It is clear that the EC will review the situation by the beginning of the summer and use the data at hand to start work on this report to be presented in October this year. As a result of the EC evaluation, the first of its kind for the Republic of Moldova, together with the countries of the Western Balkans and Ukraine, we will better understand what chances the Republic of Moldova has for obtaining a favorable decision for starting the accession negotiations.

There are voices from the EU that support the opening of accession

negotiations for our country. Here I am referring in particular to the members of the European Parliament, to the head of the European Council, Charles Michel, who was in Chisinau and declared that there is political support for such a decision, but also some presidents and prime ministers of the European states who support us on this way.

There remains a big question mark as to how these efforts related to reforms of our authorities will be perceived or in what context they will be analyzed. On the one hand, the EC may say that reforms are being implemented, and even if the final results of some of them are not there yet, progress is seen. Based on this progress we can come up with an interim assessment showing that things are still moving in the right direction.

On the other hand, if in the coming months we witness some more visible problems and blockages in the justice sector or the prosecution reform, it is possible that the Brussels assessment will focus on the state of affairs at that time in the Republic of Moldova and it can say that, unfortunately, at present, because of existing problems, we cannot move to a higher stage in the accession process, because of certain challenges registered in different areas.

So there are two sides of the coin that could be taken into account and here as well it depends a lot on how the situation develops in the coming months, whether or not this situation in the justice sector from March will repeat together with the pre-vetting process. Let us hope this will not happen, but we cannot know what will the state of affairs be in the sector that is still affected by the interests of certain oligarchs. This is especially felt when we see the divergences within the justice sector and the anti-corruption between the institutions that should cooperate and have a normal dialogue.

■ Thank you!



The EPC Summit – reflections on the strategic significance and benefits for the security and defence of the Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova will host the second meeting of the European Political Community (EPC) on June 1, 2023, which will be the largest international event organized in the nearly 32 years of the country's independence. The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, when announcing the host country of the event, said that the meeting "will aim to promote peace and defend the common interests of Europe". Obviously, with regard to this desideratum, there are expectations that the event will have major implications for the Republic of Moldova. It is already realized that the stake of this summit for the Republic of Moldova is related to the promotion of our European aspirations, but also to the commitment of our European partners in ensuring the country's security from the economic and energy perspective in the context of the need to solve the defense problem in Europe.

However, in order to aspire to certain security benefits as a result of the EPC Summit in Chisinau, its significance in general is well known. Thus, the European Political Community is conceived, at the initiative of France, as a platform for political and security cooperation on issues of common European political interest of the 27 member states of the European Union with 17 European partners, a platform launched in May 2022 following the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine.

The first EPC meeting took place in October 2022 in Prague (Czech Republic) and focused on energy and security issues. However, the EPC still lacks a clear focus and does not yet have a formal structure or a secretariat, which allows it to develop and establish in the future several directions related not only to security, but also to defense. That is why this forum could become for the European Union (EU) a political instrument that contributes to the common European defense framework. There are already opinions that it is not a

question of turning the EPC into a common pan-European defense organization. This would not be productive, as some countries participating in the EPC have very conflicting security relations (Armenia and Azerbaijan; Greece and Turkey), and directing suddenly the course of the entire organization towards defense would lead to resistance from several European countries. However, it is appreciated that the EU could strive to create an independent initiative inspired by the scope of EPC. Thus, (i) developing an informal security dialogue at the European level can contribute to (ii) building a potential preliminary coalition that includes non-EU members and (iii) using European security and defense policy to build a defense discourse and to interact with the states of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), Eastern Partnership and EPC on security and defense issues of common interest. This will allow the security and defense issues to be discussed more frequently as an additional channel between the EU on the one hand, and Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine on the other.

Significance and strategic directions

In this framework, we cannot neglect the format of the EPC which can be approached from several perspectives – "who is invited" and "who is not invited" or "who is excluded", - having strategic as well as political meanings. First, the exclusion of Russia and Belarus demonstrates their isolation and shows European unity against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Second, although the United States is not invited as a participant, this does not mean distancing or isolation, but highlights the effort of Europeans to take greater responsibility for managing their own affairs. Third, the EPC provides space for the EU institutions and members to discuss security and economic issues with European neighbours, including major military powers such as the UK and Turkey, and major energy suppliers such as Norway or Azerbaijan.

Moreover, the *Strategic Compass* (SC), the EU's strategic vision, illustrates that the EU's area of interest is quite extensive and covers from the Arctic to Africa, from the Pacific to the Gulf. Brussels recognizes that it needs partners, partnerships, and cooperation schemes to deal with the risks and opportunities facing Europeans in this broad area of interest. In addition, the implications of the war in Ukraine, especially the energy crisis, has accelerated the need for access to and partnerships with alternative energy producers and transfer countries. Therefore, the EPC can be accepted as a

political extension of the general vision outlined by the SC.

At the same time, there are some critics who claim that the EPC duplicates other formats, but this is debatable as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) counts Russia among its members. Moreover, starting out as a forum for political dialogue, the OSCE is now more mission-oriented on the ground, as opposed to high-level meetings for discussions on broader political issues. At the same time, the EPC is not intended to challenge the role and missions of NATO or even the European Union in terms of security and defense, having no plans to include mutual defense clauses or collective security guarantees.

In this context of reflections on the strategic significance of the European Political Community, we can highlight the benefits for the Republic of Moldova from the perspective of security and defense in the context of the Chisinau Summit. In fact, as previously mentioned, the EPC does not duplicate the EU activities, but provides a format for new initiatives that will respond to concrete situations in the field of security, and making use of existing instruments.

Increased attention to the security of the Republic of Moldova

We cannot neglect the fact that since the beginning of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the European Union has actively contributed to the consolidation of the security and defense sector of the Republic of Moldova. On the one hand, the leaders of the European Union understood that in case of the occupation of Ukraine by Russia, the next target could be the Republic of Moldova, and this would bring the Russian Federation to the borders of the EU and NATO in the vicinity of Romania. On the other hand, until the military invasion in Ukraine, instruments were developed to strengthen the EU's Common Security

and Defense Policy, including in the area of external assistance, which allowed the intensification of investments in the development of the security and defense sector of the Republic of Moldova. That is why, during the last period, the European Union, through its external financing instruments, also supported force institutions such as the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI).

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has been primarily assisted in the field of migration and asylum, but also in border defense matters. The assistance was of a financial, material nature and in the form of the deployment of FRONTEX experts for advice, training, and direct cooperation at border crossing points, and managing the flow of refugees from Ukraine. More than that, in November 2022, an operational mechanism called the European Union Security Center for internal security and state border management of the Republic of Moldova, also called the EU Security HUB, was established. The HUB is designed to enhance the ability of the Ministry of Internal Affairs subdivisions to deal with the alarming increase in cross-border crimes and hybrid threats, which have become more numerous and sophisticated since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

It is worth noting that the EU's assistance to the Ministry of Internal Affairs was also substantial until the war in Ukraine. The EU has always been a supporter of the development of a genuine rule of law with legal bodies equipped with the necessary capabilities to defend public order, ensure the security of the state border, and respond to exceptional situations in various fields. Accordingly, the results of the Summit would contribute to intensifying the existing framework of cooperation in matters of security, energy, trade and defense with the EU in general, as well as bilaterally (with EU member countries) on common challenges. At the same time, this Summit is an extremely valuable opportunity for the Republic of Moldova to show that it is a reliable partner in its European journey.

If we refer to the defense sector, we cannot neglect the fact that in this field, initially, the EU and the Republic of Moldova had a very modest cooperation. This consisted in the participation of the Moldovan military in EU training missions on the African continent (e.g. EUTM Mali, EUMAM in the Central African Republic). However, the soldiers of the National Army (NA) and civilian personnel benefit from training carried out within the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) of the European Union. Between 2014 and 2021, 9 national experts were seconded to EU crisis management missions.

European funding for defence

More recently, in March 2021, *European Peace Facility* (EPF) was established to finance all actions of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the military and defense fields, with the aim of preventing conflicts, to maintain peace and strengthen security by enhancing the defense capacity of third states. With the launch of the EDF, a new impetus was given in the field of defence, however, the EPF was intended to contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the EU's External Action by strengthening the capacities of peace support operations and managing the flow of illegal immigrants from the African continent. However, the EPF also aims to strengthen the capacities of third countries and partner organizations in military and defense matters. Respectively, in the field of defense, for the year 2021, the European Council approved the assistance measures (7 million euros) for the Republic of Moldova, aimed at strengthening the medical capabilities of the National Army and increasing the capabilities of genists. However, in the context of the military invasion in Ukraine, it was necessary for the EU to strengthen the effectiveness of the EPF financial instrument, thus the EU also became the biggest contributor to strengthening the defense capacity of the Republic of Moldova. In June 2022, the Council adopted an assistance measure within the EPF amounting to 40 million euros

for the benefit of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova. The assistance measure contributes to the strengthening of the capacities of the logistics, mobility, command and control, cyber defense, unmanned aerial reconnaissance (long-range mobile ground surveillance radar) and tactical communications units of the National Army of Moldova by providing non-lethal equipment, relevant supplies and services, including training related to the equipment.

Expectations for modernization of the defense sector

Thus, the expectations of the Republic of Moldova in the field of defense, after EPC 2023, is obviously the continuation of cooperation in the field of security and defense, as well as the strengthening of political support in increasing financial support for the development of the necessary military capabilities. At the same time, the EU's international and institutional mechanisms for approving the financial support, the procedure for acquiring military equipment and its delivery is usually a bureaucratic and long process. Thus, simplifying the procedures and reducing the delivery time of the necessary capabilities would be a very beneficial thing for the National Army. An important aspect that should be discussed in order to support the field of defense refers to the possibility of EU funds being connected to some National Army endowment programmes that are ongoing but do not have sufficient funding from the state budget. This mechanism would shorten the time needed for faster delivery or operationalization of critical military capabilities.

Beyond the joint effort of the EU instruments to increase the resilience of the Republic of Moldova, the fact that the EU's approach in the field of defense is comprehensive is also valuable, being oriented towards increasing the resistance capacity of the entire society. In this sense, the Republic of Moldova benefited from financial assistance in the field of energy security manifested both through the direct support of the population and through investments intended to identify alternative sources of energy supply and ensure energy independence from Russia. In total, a calculation of the investments to be directed to the Republic of Moldova in the next two to three years in the energy field will exceed 1.5 billion euros. In addition, the issue of the protection of Europe's critical infrastructure was on the agenda of the Prague Summit discussions, and we assume that it will be discussed further, arising from the need for a common strategy in this field.

Moreover, the importance of a multidimensional approach to the Summit is also determined by the fact that on April 24, 2023, the European Union Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova) was established by the Council of the European Union. EUPM Moldova was established within the Common Security and Defense Policy. The objective of this civilian mission is to enhance the resilience of the country's security sector in crisis management and hybrid threats, including cyber security and countering foreign information manipulation and interference. The mission will also provide strategic advice on the development of strategies and policies and identify needs to strengthen capabilities for early warning, detection, identification,

threat attribution, and response to hybrid threats. In addition, EUPM Moldova will implement projects in these areas. Hence the expectations of the Moldovan authorities regarding the development of concrete steps to strengthen cyber security with the assistance of the EU, but also as a result of the Summit. Cyber security is another basic pillar for strengthening the security and defense sector of the Republic of Moldova, especially since on May 2, 2023, the Law on Cyber Security of the Republic of Moldova was adopted with the support of the EU. The law aims to improve resilience to hybrid threats and increase the cyber resilience of public sector organizations and critical infrastructure in the country.

Thus, EU support for the security and defense sector is not possible without adequate tools to be developed, but also without the existence of a constant political dialogue, both with the representatives of the EU institutions on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, and through platforms such as EPC. The platform gives the country access to a wide range of European leaders, such as the great military powers - the United Kingdom and Turkey, or the major energy suppliers - Azerbaijan or Norway, or to the experience of colleagues from the Western Balkans, who are in the process of joining the EU. Therefore, the Summit represents the necessary framework for the Republic of Moldova to learn about the positions and reasoning of different countries, to plead for its defense needs, but also to develop joint initiatives in areas of common interest, such as climate change, development of artificial intelligence, energy sustainability, migration or research and innovation.

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