

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 • OCTOBER 2019 • NR.10 (164)

Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

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Mention should be made that all materials were developed end of October 2019

News in Brief



The European Commission approved, on the last day of October, a new tranche of budget support for the Republic of Moldova in amount of 24.85 million euros. This installment will contribute to improving police services, increasing economic opportunities in the field of agriculture and rural development, strengthening support programmes for the energy sector reform and public finances. Regarding the police reform, the money is allocated to improve the conditions and quality of studies in the training and excellence centers for the police, to implement a system of continuous vocational training and to improve the conditions in the preventive detention isolators. The EU resumed the budget support and macro-financial assistance in July 2019 in order to support the process of structural reforms undertaken by the Government. Since then, the EU has offered 73.54 mln. euros and by the end of the year the disbursement of another 40 million is planned.



After five years of implementation of the Association Agreement, the sectoral cooperation between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova is much more consolidated today, especially in the fields of research, innovation and education. The benefits have been multiplied by the visa-free regime with the EU, and the cooperation in the field of foreign policy and security has been deepened. However, the functioning of democratic institutions, the strengthening of the rule of law and the independence of justice have not undergone clear changes, which has severely affected the quality of the EU-Moldova dialogue and the full capitalisation on the European support. These are the main findings of the "Alternative Report: five years of implementation of the Association Agreement - Progress, Constraints and Priorities", presented on October 30 by the Institute for European Policies and Reforms and the Independent Analytical Center "Expert-Grup". According to the authors of the report, despite the reported constraints, due to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area our country has approached the EU from an economic point of view, which has become our main economic partner. At present, about 70% of Moldovan exports are oriented to the EU, and the net impact of exports is estimated at over 367 million euros. This has contributed to the creation of over 15,000 jobs, helped to increase the budget revenues by 5% and investments in the private sector- by 320 million euros.



The results and prospects of the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) were discussed on October 23rd by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Nicu Popescu, with the ambassadors of the EU member states responsible for EaP who were in Chisinau. The interlocutors noted the importance of the EaP in bringing the countries of the Eastern Neighborhood closer to the EU during the last ten years. With reference to the successes achieved by our country, we mentioned the liberalization of the visa regime with the EU, the signing of the Association Agreement which also includes the Free Trade Area, the implementation of various projects that offer concrete benefits to the citizens and the business environment. "The EaP has made a major contribution to changing the dynamics of the economic development of the Republic of Moldova. In recent years, Moldovan exports to the post-Soviet area have decreased by 500 million Euros, while in the EU they increased by 700 million Euros. Our access to the European market not only compensated the losses on the Eastern market, but also provided an additional surplus of 200 million Euros, said the head of the Moldovan diplomacy. For their part, the EaP Ambassadors reiterated the EU's support for the reforms initiated by the Moldovan Government.

A country like a boat. But do we also have paddles?



SURSA: TV8

Sorina Ștefârță

October is over, leaving the memory of an election campaign halfway consumed, a bitter taste of a battle that was never as boring as this and an avalanche of assumptions about "what will be after"

the victory / loss of the Chisinau City Hall by one of the two candidates "with chances". At the time I'm writing this text, I could only venture into forecasts, but what relevance will they have after a week, when the show is over?! Because, by the time you

will be reading this edition of the newsletter, the final results of the elections (the second round) will be certainly already known, and the journalists will be competing in making meticulous calculations and inventing new infographics, to give us a the most

- accurate picture of the results of the most recent exercise of the Moldovan democracy ...

However (although I am ready to bet), I feel that the elections did not cancel the question “what will be next?”. On the contrary, no matter who wins, the discussions about the future of the ruling alliance - and with them, the discussions about the future of the country in general - are getting back on the agenda. They are being launched by one politician and another. Some say the alliance should be reformed, others suggest it should be completely changed. And we all understand that we do not understand anything - only the political clouds are becoming even blacker.

In the meantime, the world around is rocking. In the West, governments are changing and they are looking desperately for European commissioners for a new Commission pending; and further west, across the Atlantic, cities are burning because the price of tram tickets have slightly increased (I honestly don't even know if there are trams there), and the world's strongest leaders, finding themselves alone in the face of *impeachment*, prove to be mere mortals liable to prosecution. In the East, solutions are being sought for a war, which being almost six years old, is risking to become a daily habit, while further East, the sanitary-political decision-makers have again found some flies in the Moldovan apples, failing actually to see that the real danger is their own bumblebees.

Where are we in this rush - and, especially, how do we position ourselves? Are we just a wave-driven boat or do we have also paddles to keep us going? We go to vote, but do we really choose our leaders and destiny? And to what extent they are “our” leaders as they swore by the Constitution?

We will discuss about all this in the current issue of the Newsletter. Otherwise, November is going to be hot. We live in Moldova, and that is what we are always busy with.

The Government aims to democratize the Transnistrian region and improve the people's lives there



Victoria Roșa, advisor to the Prim-minister on security and defence issues

Though the state security issues are not always on the surface, and the public opinion remembers about them mainly during periods of social tension, the authorities assure us that this area is permanently in the spotlight of the decision makers in charge. But are they ready to respond to the imminent challenges? And what are the priorities of the current government in the field? I talked to Mrs. Victoria Roșa, adviser on security and defence issues in the Prim-minister's Maia Sandu Office. Prior to joining the government team, Victoria Roșa gained experience as an expert and programme coordinator at the NATO Information and Documentation Center in the Republic of Moldova, IDIS “Viitorul”, and as Executive Director of the Foreign Policy Association.

The Eastern neighbour is demanding more attention...

■ **Ms. Rosa, you have been in this position for almost half a year. What were the most sensitive files you took over and how are things now?**

■ If I look back, I realize that, indeed, when I took over the security and defence file, we were in a rather delicate situation. Because there have always been discussions and even speculations on the topics related to these areas in the public space and especially during that tense period of transition. There exist discussions also now, with various periods of amplification. And the most sensitive subject remains the Transnistrian file. The current government is fully aware of this fact, respectively we are watching closely any development and, at the same time, we are promoting our own vision, which is built on avoiding the concept of federalization of the Republic of Moldova.

It is a concept that was usually thrown into the public space when they wanted to escalate certain situations. Therefore, it is very important that this Government came and explained very clearly that there is no federalization in the regulatory process. In contrast, like all the Moldovan citizens, the residents from the left bank of the Nistru need a reformed justice and combatting corruption and smuggling. Thus, the democratization of the Transnistrian region is viewed precisely through the implementation of these policies.

■ **An important element in ensuring the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova is the relationship with the neighbours. And when talking about the regulation and reintegration process with the left bank, Ukraine has the biggest role to play...**

■ A crucial role, I would say, as Chisinau does not control a certain part of its border with Ukraine, that of the Transnistrian segment, and our colleagues in Kiev could help us in securing this part of the border. That is why the Ukrainian capital was among the first destinations on the agenda of the Prime Minister Maia Sandu. It was a fruitful visit, during which several important topics for bilateral cooperation were addressed, including the one on joint checkpoints on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border. Negotiations are currently underway to increase the number of these joint checkpoints and we hope that we will have a positive outcome soon. Another topic is the European agenda, but also taking over of Ukraine's experience in certain areas of their cooperation with the EU.

■ **What would these successful practices be?**

■ For example, a more active presence and involvement of our country in EU processes, as well as involving the representatives of the Member States or of the European institutions as our advocates in the Euro-integration process. Thus, the Republic of Moldova could become more visible in the EU, and with that, promote its priorities more actively.

The development partners treat the two banks equally

■ **How does the Government view the regional context? Because tectonic movements also occur in Romania where a new Executive is expected, and in Ukraine, where President Zelensky is trying to impose his vision to stop the military hostilities...**

■ It's a pretty delicate context and this has been going on for several years now. Obviously, given the situation in Ukraine, our neighbour in the East demands more attention. Precisely for this reason, but also because we also have our own "suspended" conflict, the Government's mission and purpose is to not admit any escalation, any revitalization. In parallel, we continue to hold discussions, including within the Chisinau-Tiraspol working groups, and to do our best to advance the democratization of the region and improve the lives of the people there. We are convinced that these two elements can be solid preconditions for the beginning of political negotiations later, when the time is right.

■ **How effective are the efforts aimed at strengthening the confidence building measures between the two banks, supported financially by the country's development partners?**

■ First of all, I want to thank them for this support and for the fact that, in the social infrastructure rehabilitation projects, they treat the right and the left banks equally, thus contributing to the improvement of the lives of all our citizens. Even though, quite often, these citizens take the help offered for granted... As in the case of the liberalized visa regime that more and more people see as normal - and, in a way, it is natural to be so - and forget how much work has been behind this decision. To return to confidence building measures, I would say that it is important to respect the principle of partnership between the two banks in the process of developing and implementing projects. Only this way they will get closer.

■ **In the last week of October, President Dodon met again, for the sixth or seventh time since taking office, with the leader of the Transnistrian region, Vadim Krasnoselski. Where is the Government in this equation? Or the responsibility for the dialogue with Tiraspol was passed on to the head of state?**

■ Mr. Igor Dodon, according to his duties as President of the Republic of Moldova, has implications in solving the Transnistrian problem. However, the basic responsibility rests with the Executive. And within the Government there is a constant dialogue with the so-called authorities on the left bank - through the Deputy Prime Minister Vasile Șova, who manages this file and who is following closely the situation and the discussions within the regulatory formats "5 + 2" and "1 + 1". This is the official mechanism of interaction.

In the field of security, we also want to cooperate with non-governmental actors

■ **Apart from the Transnistrian issue, what are the other security challenges?**

■ One of the challenges is also how we approach security as a whole. Because we know we have the National Army, we trust it, but we almost do not know how it works. And yet ... We should know, however, that today, the field of security also means civilians, civil servants in all institutions. Respectively, the security of the state can only be ensured when any policy developed by a public institution also takes into account these aspects. I would bring as an example the "investment screening" policies, which are currently being worked out and which are intended to exclude incidents such as the concession of the Airport. That is, let us make sure that we will not allow investments that could affect the security of the state. And this depends not only on the army and the military, but on the whole body of civil servants and the capacity for inter-institutional communication. The challenges include the country's energy security, which is a priority for the Government, as well as

the informational security with the whole “set” of elements of the hybrid war - fake news, misinformation, propaganda ... We are working on this and even are planning to create a coordination council that would include representatives of civil society, media, public authorities, to participate in the prevention of information attacks. As a matter of fact, we want the state institutions responsible for security to be more open and to actively cooperate on this segment also with non-governmental actors.

■ *Because you mentioned the state institutions, which is the fate of the partnerships to increase the defense capacity, including of the National Army, previously agreed with the North Atlantic Alliance or some of its member states, in the situation when the Minister of Defense is the exponent of a party that is pretty anti-NATO?*

■ The processes are under way and Mr. Pavel Voicu, the Minister of Defense, sent very clear messages in this regard: we will continue the existing partnerships in the field. The reason is very simple: this partnership helps us to develop and strengthen the defense sector. I would like to mention here also the bilateral relations with the United States of America, which contributes significantly to the development of the defense sector of the Republic of Moldova, not to mention the humanitarian projects. I've participated recently, together with Mrs. Maia Sandu, in the inauguration of a fire station in Taraclia, which was built from scratch as part of such a project, with an investment of about 400 million USD. I think the arguments are superfluous here and I am convinced that this is a reality for whoever may lead this ministry

■ *Thank you very much for the interview and I wish you success.*

Sorina Ștefăruță
Chișinău, 30 October 2019

Editorial

Mădălin Necșuțu,
BalkanInsight.com reporter

The Transnistrian file between the domestic political games and the troubled regional equation

The Transnistrian file has stagnated in the last three years, during which time the leaders from Chisinau and those from Tiraspol did nothing more than photos for the social networks, without any tangible results following the meetings they had...

Having been elected leaders almost simultaneously - nearly three years ago, one in Chisinau and the other in the self-proclaimed republic across the Nistru - Igor Dodon and Vadim Krasnoselski met, at the end of October 2019, already for the sixth time. At least for Igor Dodon these meetings were more of a PR exercise which aimed at building an image of mediator in the Transnistrian conflict. At the same time, Vadim Krasnoselski only followed the indications of Moscow, namely to attend these meetings without putting anything concrete on the discussion table.

A “win-win” type situation from the image point of view, but sterile in terms of solving concrete issues on the Chisinau-Tiraspol agenda. At the same time, the tangible aspects of the negotiations, which were packed in the so-called “Berlin Package” were discussed at the level of committees of both parties under the Government umbrella.

In all these years, Dodon and Krasnoselski have mutually studied each other. While on the right bank of the Nistru there was created a



somewhat justified general perception that the Chisinau authorities had rather lost and made too many concessions compare to what they received, the ones on the left bank have obtained considerable economic and social benefits.

The “small steps” policy has rather benefited the secessionist authorities, without giving any sign that they would like to discuss the hottest topics, namely the political aspects of the problem. Thus, the “political basket” of the Transnistrian file remains a taboo topic for Tiraspol. Moreover, while Chisinau is militating and respectively offering a form of extended autonomy in the case of the Transnistrian region, Tiraspol remains anchored in the idea of independence and joining the Russian Federation.

The vacuum of the Government interest filled in by the presidential institution

Krasnoselski noted that in 2018, there were about 95 expert-level meetings, while this year - only 20. De facto, Chisinau and Tiraspol avoided the discussions on the Transnistrian file. For the most part, it happened because of the focus on the electoral campaign for the parliamentary elections, then on the campaign for the local ones, but also against the background of a reduced appetite of the Sandu Government to deal with

this issue. Especially since, in this equation of government, the Socialists took the lion's share, insisting on the Reintegration portfolio given to Vasile Șova.

From the perspective of the ACUM Block, the social and economic issues are of a higher priority than the Transnistrian file that has been delayed for more than 27 years. However, the vacuum of major interest on the part of the pro-European half of the Government has opened the window for greater involvement of President Igor Dodon and his staff, who are trying to take over more and more foreign policy issues, which are in fact the prerogative of the Executive.

While in the years 2017 and 2018 specific steps were taken in the Transnistrian file, within the eight points of the "Berlin plus" Package, a stagnation was observed in 2019. The most recent round of negotiations held in the "5 + 2" format on October 9-10 in Bratislava did not yield any concrete results. Even the post-conference communication left much to be desired. Only the head of the OSCE Mission to the Republic of Moldova, Claus Neukirch, spoke vaguely, on behalf of all, without mentioning anything concrete.

Before Bratislava, Vasile Șova elaborated a document on a possible political solution for the Transnistrian issue that was not approved by the ACUM Bloc, which indicates disagreements on this issue within the governing alliance.

Another important aspect of Bratislava is that the parties did not even mention the destruction / evacuation of the Russian ammunition from the Transnistrian region, an aspect based on which Igor Dodon started a true Western tour in August-September. However, the OSCE shows confidence after the Bratislava talks and their concretisation earlier this week in Bavaria, Germany.

As part of his recent "European tour", President Igor Dodon tried to climb this wave and become a player again in the West's negotiations with Russia. A kind of bridge between East and West, so present in the socialist rhetoric of the last decade. Thus, the idea of evacuating

the ammunition from Transnistria seems to have died quickly very much like the previous discussions of the military aspects of this file.

Political dividends

The Socialist Party led by Igor Dodon wants a quick settlement of the case in the political sense, while the time is patient with the Transnistrians ... The conflict in eastern Ukraine, which tends to become similar to the Transnistrian one, is working in favour of the Tiraspol politicians. Attention has shifted to Ukraine, and Transnistria has remained in the periphery of the Western interests in the negotiations with the Russian Federation.

Indeed, since 2014, with the annexation of Crimea and the start of military actions in the eastern regions of Ukraine- Donbas and Lugansk- the interest of the West in the Transnistrian file has gradually diminished. The relevance of a solution for this file would now be more like finding a template for the conflict resolution in Ukraine.

The Tiraspol regime does not have the slightest interest in entering the political part of the case. The one who is in a hurry now, de facto, is Igor Dodon. In the perspective of the fight for the second presidential term, the current leader of Chisinau does not have a specific theme for the election campaign and that is precisely why Dodon is trying to force the "Transnistrian card", in order to be able to present himself as the powerful president who solves the Transnistrian crisis after almost three decades. Thus, the emotional theme of "patriotism" and duty will be at the heart of the campaign rhetoric for the presidential elections of 2020.

At the same time, let us not forget that in the last parliamentary elections, Vadim Krasnoselski tested the electorate power of the Transnistrian region in the economy of the elections organized by Chisinau. It is impossible to believe that those hundreds of minibuses and buses could have been organized on the left bank of the Nistru without the approval of the Tiraspol leaders.

The organization and logistics have been the living proof of what federalization in the

logic of the "Kozak plan" means as well as the influx of voters from the left bank, most of them paid, in making capital decisions regarding the political future of the Republic of Moldova. This is why the leader of the secessionist region is now trying to get the most out of his relationship with Igor Dodon and his need in the votes of the residents of left bank of the Nistru. To accomplish this, Dodon and PSRM will have to make even greater concessions to Tiraspol.

A dangerous precedent

Unfortunately, this state of affairs could have a multiplier effect. The need for increasing possible support of Dodon in the perspective of next year's presidential elections opened the others' appetite to demand even bigger concessions from Chisinau.

The Bashkan of the Gagauz autonomy, Irina Vlah, felt this among the first and declared openly, during a TV show, that the laws regarding the status of the Administrative Territorial Unit Gagauz Yeri and that of Transnistria have to be identical, ie in the form of extended autonomy. Putting Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region on the same level is a re-edition of the ideas set out in the Kozak plan as a principle, only now Comrat wants an even greater political weight. Thus, instead of the reintegration of this small region, we are witnessing new centrifugal trends against a conceding background prepared by President Igor Dodon following the 2020 presidential elections.

In her turn, the Speaker of Parliament, Zinaida Greceanii, declared a few weeks ago that the Legislature will try to adopt "The Gagauzian draft laws" until December 23rd, when the 25th anniversary of the autonomy will be celebrated.

All these sinusoidal movements in the Chisinau-Tiraspol-Comrat triangle, with Igor Dodon and his Socialists in the middle, are announcing interesting times for Chisinau from the security point of view. While, for the moment, Ukraine is the regional instability hotbed, the year 2020 will be announced as a test also for the Republic of Moldova.

You cannot build a prosperous future based on a wasteful model



Dumitru Mînzarari, researcher, doctor of political science, associate expert with IPRE

I met Dumitru Mînzarari in Chisinau between the two rounds of the local elections. He came home for an IPRE brand event, where he is an associate expert, but also after a tense period during which he took his PhD in political science at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor in the USA. However, the latter did not prevent him from monitoring attentively and analyzing the political developments at home, and respectively, coming up with suggestions for a better governance. To learn how the Republic of Moldova is seen from the shore of the five lakes by a person who had been involved also in the Moldovan public administration - in 2018, Dumitru Mînzarari was Secretary of State at the Ministry of Defense – read the interview below.

■ Mr. Mînzarari, even if you did not vote - you came home after the first round of elections and will be leaving before the second one - I still want to ask you how you found these local elections compared to other elections in recent years? How powerful the traditional geopolitical scarecrow has been this time?

■ I must admit that I did not follow this campaign very attentively, because - at least in the political system of the Republic of Moldova - the local elections are not as relevant, from the research point of view, as the parliamentary ones. In the sense that people opt for a particular candidate and often it does not matter for them which party the respective candidate comes from. As far as the “geopolitical scarecrow” is concerned, besides the fact that this time it has had a limited presence, the voter does not perceive this message as a geopolitical one. On the contrary, I would rather say that the Moldovan voters are so pragmatic that when they sent geopolitical messages - such

as either Europe or Russia - they pass this message through an interpretation filter and simply think how they will be better off, how their economic situation and living standards will improve. This was also confirmed in the discussions I had with various people during these days spent in the Republic of Moldova. The geopolitical message is perceived through the perspective of economic well-being. And I think that it is precisely this aspect which is little explored and insufficiently exploited.

■ How should this happen?

■ One solution would be to give people, as often as possible, examples of the economic situation representing one geopolitical orientation or the other. For example, let them be told that Europeans are doing better and that, if we want to improve our situation, we should take over Europe’s economic policies. For the “European good” did not appear from the air, but as a result of promoting policies based on clear rules. They should be told we should take over the European model and not wait always for help. In parallel, let’s show - as I do in my online posts - that the Russians are investing millions of dollars in Syria, while they do not care about their own citizens. There are hundreds of villages in Russia where people live in poverty... This should be repeatedly told to the Moldovans - our future depends on the model that we will adopt and adapt to our conditions. You cannot build a prosperous future based on a wasteful model.

În orice alianță, trebuie să te asiguri și cu un set de pârghii de control

■ Regarding geopolitics, is your Facebook slogan - “I am a soldier who

is fighting his own war"-about it? Or, maybe, it's about the struggle you are facing with the current government, being one of its fiercest critics?..

■ The slogan you refer to means that I have beliefs and that I am ready to fight for them. I self-identify as a liberal, a little conservative, but not to the extent that I wish to return to the past, in a country that would mimic the USSR. Because it is exactly this what Russia has done lately - the Soviet Union has been revived in a worse variant... As far as the current government is concerned, I think you're wrong - I'm not criticizing it. It is true that when the current governing alliance was created, I was much more sceptical of this step. But I also wrote that, although it was a bad scenario, it was not the worst in the existing conditions; it was the least evil I could choose then. I also published a set of policies that ACUM could have taken into account if they wished not to lose their positions. For ACUM has entered this coalition with quite strong positions, when President Dodon, following the leaks in the information space through which he recognized that he had received money from the Russians, etc., has become extremely vulnerable. ACUM, however, he did not exploit this chance and, seeing how today the head of state is attacking his coalition partners, criticizing the activity of several ministries, it is obvious that the construction of control levers has been missed. In any alliance, you exchange positions, portfolios, policies, but you have to make sure you have a set of levers too. This has not happened and thus the feeling that I am critical.

■ *In this context, you have noted recently that, after the general local elections, a renegotiation, a reformation of the governing alliance would be required. How realistic is this when at least one of the constituents of the ruling coalition is suspected of executing the Kremlin indications?*

■ From the beginning, when they created the alliance, ACUM and PRSM

had different intentions. Yes, these political actors wanted to get rid of the Plahotniuc regime, but their goals were different. However, at present, it is in the interest of both parties to maintain the coalition, because, if they destroy it, we will face a period of risks... The local elections, even though they are not as representative as the parliamentary ones, reflect some tendencies and, in particular, they create administrative tools that can be used later. It is also a psychological signal, if you want: for the politicians, the number of mayors or councilors a party takes is an indicator of its popularity. However, today no political party is capable of governing on its own, while early elections would be a lottery for all. That is why, for both PSRM and ACUM it is more convenient to maintain the *status quo*. In addition, I believe that the PSRM hopes to attract more fugitives from the PDM, in order to try to reform the coalition so that it can govern as a majority. The latter seems to be their main goal.

■ *Do you really think the Socialists want to govern?*

■ Certainly, yes - and they are ready to do it. But, until then, they are aware that they need the assistance provided by the European Union, and the coalition with ACUM is an additional guarantee that they will receive funding. This is why I suggested to the ACUM to explain to the PSRM that the Ministry of Economy or the Ministry of Finance, which are responsible for the "financial relationship" with the EU, should continue to be managed by Maia Sandu's team in which the external donors have more confidence. So, despite the existing debates and criticisms of the Government by Igor Dodon on several occasions, I believe that the ultimate interest of all is to maintain the alliance. The alternative scenarios are too risky and nobody is ready to take the risks yet.

■ *When will they be ready? What is the life expectancy of this Government?*

■ The probability of early elections will increase as we approach the presidential elections. I do not know if the problem of organizing both ballots at the same time will be raised.

The socialists are the ones who try to mess up the reforms, after which they accuse

■ *How do you see the situation in the ACUM? Octavian Țăcu, Iurie Reniță, Lilian Carp are voices telling us there is no total harmony within the Bloc...*

■ ACUM is a young political formation and, if we are to be objective, I think it was not fully prepared to take over the government. All the more amazing its performance so far in terms of the act of government, because they have done quite well... As for this internal conflict, I think it is a natural one, but it also indicates the existing weaknesses in the formation. One of the vulnerabilities of the ACUM comes on a populist logic used also by Igor Dodon - "people have told me that something is wrong, that someone in the Government is not doing their job well..." The ACUM Governance should take this approach into consideration and identify solutions to it. Because, even if we admit that it is not 100% correct, it reflects the perception of a part of the population. And a political party, in addition to strategic planning, should also respond to people's perceptions, otherwise it is a loser.

■ *What would be the necessary steps from your point of view?*

■ I would suggest the government to go along two parallel lines, especially in the ministries that are directly responsible for solving the citizens' problems. One that deals with the current topics, collecting, monitoring and responding to problems, but also popularizing them quickly. Because this is what the policy process is about: less is paid for the qualitative work, than for the qualitative

work well known to the public. If we look at the PSRM, they do not have many ministries, but they massively popularize every step, like "I shook hands with the Emperor of Japan"... The second parallel line, to which I refer, should remain strategic planning, where the people from the ACUM are pretty good. Ultimately, because of this game of blaming the Government, I think that the ACUM should find a diplomatic way to make public the situations in which the PSRM blocked certain initiatives that were for the benefit of the people. For the socialists are the ones who mess up the reforms, after which they accuse.

■ ***If you were to do an x-ray of the government structure, which are today the most vulnerable institutions in terms of carrying out tasks?***

■ I think all of them, to a greater or lesser extent. The ACUM government came with new people, but the administrative nucleus of some institutions is the one installed, developed and promoted by the PDM. There are still many networks of the PDM interests in some ministries and I would not be surprised if these networks are consciously sabotaging certain initiatives. Another aspect relates to the central public administration reform carried out by the PDM - a reform which, in essence, I think was well-intentioned, but which has drastically reduced the number of civil servants in government ministries and agencies. Yes, it sounds great - fewer ministries and fewer officials! In reality, however, it was a predominantly populist action, as a result of which the efficiency and working capacity of the institutions decreased, and ultimately it is the citizens that suffer the most. We should learn to make reforms not because they would favour a political actor, but in guidance with the needs of the state. If, for example, in a ministry the workload on the relationship with the EU has increased, then you should increase the number of civil servants, as well as their salary. And this has to happen in all areas of public administration.

The most effective leverage is law enforcement

■ ***How, in your opinion, did the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova evolve during these five months of the ACUM-PSRM governance, as not once the messages on certain topics coming from Chisinau were more than contradictory?..***

■ I would say that the situation in the foreign policy generally reflects the state of affairs. The agreement to establish the alliance was made in a hurry, ie not all the powers and obligations of the parties were separated. Most likely, the ACUM did not realize the significance and consequences of certain requirements of the PSRM - they understood them only later, when they what was happening ... As a result, the impression is created that the relations with the Russian Federation were delegated to President Dodon. It would not be a totally bad decision, at first sight - having good relations with Moscow, he could open the doors, after which the technocrats would come and negotiate. Only in these few months a suspicion confirmed to me: the fact that Mr. Dodon manages the Russian file would only be good if he had no interests in his relationship with Russia. In fact, the situation is different: he said he was financed by the Russians; the press wrote that his relatives have business with high-ranking officials in Russia, etc. We have an obvious conflict of interest and in any normal country this would have consequences. But the consequences are missing and the proof to that is the fact that Mr. Dodon still dominates the relations with Russia, which is extremely harmful to the Republic of Moldova. In a slightly exaggerated way, of course, I would compare this situation with a kind of war against us.

■ ***Maybe that's why he goes to the West too, to ensure the long-awaited balance...***

■ The few visits to the West aimed rather to promote, through the mouth of a high-ranking Moldovan official, the messages that the Russians asked to promote. As he has done recently in New York, at the UN General Assembly, where the message was: do not create lines of geopolitical division in our country. In "diplomatic" translation, this means: do not get over the Russians in the Republic of Moldova, it is their area of interest. This is his real interest when he goes to the West. Otherwise, how to explain the fact that at home, within the alliance, one message is agreed for the UN, and once there the head of state reads a completely different speech?..

■ ***What realistic levers exist to anticipate and prevent such situations from happening?***

■ The most effective leverage is law enforcement. And you should not derogate from the law for Mr. Dodon just because you want to keep the alliance. On the contrary, I am inclined to believe that the alliance can be preserved, alerting the head of state to his actions. We would help him make fewer mistakes, for which he will have to answer in the future anyway. This is something that every official in this country has to understand.

The special status for the Transnistrian region is an instrument, not a purpose

■ ***Today President Dodon is meeting, for the sixth or seventh time since taking office, with the Tiraspol leader. You also noted today that there would be elements of usurpation of power in these actions. Why such an approach, since, at least officially, Mr. Dodon declares that his purpose is to reintegrate the country?***

■ I used the term politically, not legally. Although, if we open the Constitution, we see that the foreign and domestic policies of the Republic of Moldova

are implemented by the Government, under the guidance of the Parliament. The head of state, in these areas, has powers only within the limits of the law. So, in order to be able to negotiate on the reintegration of the country - even with a Russian *proxy*, such as Vadim Krasnoselski - President Dodon would need special powers from the Legislature. But I am convinced that he was not empowered by Parliament and did not coordinate anything with the Government.

■ **A year and a half ago you were talking about the fact that the “5 + 2” format is outdated, and the potential of the OSCE Mission is not fully realized. Has anything changed in the meantime apart from the fact that at the last parliamentary elections, tens of thousands of residents of the region were brought in an organized manner, which propelled some members of Parliament? Isn't this file a lost case?**

■ OSCE still has great potential, but it is not properly targeted and applied. That's because they focus too much on solutions and tools, instead of focusing on results. At present, all efforts are focused on reaching a political agreement, which will materialize in a special status. But this special status, which is seen as an end, is in reality an instrument - one meant to protect the rights of national minorities who are in a vulnerable situation. Even if, hypothetically, we admit that this would be necessary, the special status is one of the possible tools in such a situation, one of many tools. Why focus on one, when there are more? Especially that such an instrument gives the Russian Federation levers to control us?! That is why I believe that a strong diplomatic movement on the part of the government is needed, to start discussions with external partners, to ensure that the rights of our citizens, of any ethnicity, will be protected, and to slowly get this status out of the game. And then it will be easier for the OSCE, the European Union, and other

partners. Because it is obvious: the special status of the Transnistrian region is intended not to protect minorities, but to undermine the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova.

■ **You are talking about diplomatic movement, but how to impose yourself (ACUM/ Government), when your alliance partner (PSRM / President) comes up with a completely different approach?**

■ I think this is one of the reasons for the tension between the ACUM and the PSRM, which holds the Defense and Reintegration ministries in the Government. President Igor Dodon does, on these two dimensions, whatever he wants without consulting the ACUM despite the fact that, formally, Mrs. Sandu is the head of the Government. Certainly, whatever the informal agreements, it is normal to have consultations and, above all, a common position of the state.

The regulation moved exactly by zero centimetres

■ **If we think about the regional context, does the glance turn first to Romania or Ukraine?**

■ It depends on the problem we have in mind. Energy security turns us to Romania, which could provide us with an alternative in this regard. Challenges such as hybrid warfare, Moscow aggression or the environment make us look to Ukraine. I would say that our eastern neighbor is more present now. And not that Romania is not be important - simply, psychologically, we are more sensitive to problems.

■ **To what extent the movements currently occurring in Ukraine, which are intended to provide a solution to the crisis in the East of the country - the Steinmeier formula promoted by President Zelensky, the meeting in Normady - may affect us?**

■ Yes, but only for a short time. If Zelensky forces the issue, as he has been doing lately, the Russians will take advantage of it and make him vulnerable, and he will be charged by voters. Then, however, he will have to return to a policy of coercion. Because Russia's goals in Ukraine are of such a nature that consensus is impossible. Russia is strong and it doesn't make sense to give up on Kiev. So, whatever will happen now in Ukraine, it will not last more than eventually half a year, in which period, most likely, we will also feel the tensions in the East...

■ **Is there a chance to defuse them?**

■ In order to diminish the projection of this insecurity on us, it is important that the Government maintain the *status quo* unchanged. Because, when you are a weak actor, the only reasonable solution is to not allow the situation to deteriorate if you cannot improve it. And if is to analyze the attitude of Prime Minister Sandu, when she says she does not see how we can now agree something on the Transnistrian file, I am inclined to believe that she understood the need for this *status quo*. In order to avoid possible setbacks, and to think about the levers for the future that we should have de facto had long ago... You cannot initiate negotiations unless you are secured with levers. What would motivate, for instance, Tiraspol to give in after you offered them car plates? This had to be negotiated *before*, not *after*. But we did give in, we raised the level of sovereignty of the separatist region and we received nothing in return on structural regulatory directions. The regulation moved exactly by zero centimetres.

■ **Thank you for the interview and I wish you success.**

Sorina Ștefăruță
Chișinău, 28 October 2019

Expert opinion

Mihai Mogîldea, IPRE: Where the “small steps” lead us to



The last meeting between President Igor Dodon and the leader of the self-proclaimed Dniester republic, Vadim Krasnoselski, brought back on the public agenda the discussion of the viability of the actions taken by the Chisinau authorities to reconcile the two banks of the Nistru. In this context, more attention is given to the “small steps” policy - an approach which is as challenged by some people as welcomed by others... „The small steps” is also the main subject of the policy brief developed by Mihai Mogîldea, associate expert with the Institute for European Policies and Reforms, specialized in political science, EU institutions and policies.

On the 8th-10th October 2019, a new round of negotiations in the 5 + 2 format took place in Bratislava. The discussions between the parties focused on the progress made within the eight measures agreed and implemented as part of the “Berlin Plus” Package in 2016, as well as on the other issues on the agenda of the parties involved in the negotiations. Although no protocol was signed at the end of the meeting, there are assumptions that this will happen in the coming weeks. (...)

The “Berlin plus” package: the dynamics of cooperation on six key issues

To provide a detailed picture of how the commitments included in the “Berlin Plus” Package were implemented, we structured

the issues into three groups: (1) education, (2) transport, telecommunications and infrastructure, and (3) human rights.

1. Education

The first problem related to the apostillation of the diplomas issued by the higher education institutions in the Transnistrian region was addressed through the Government Decision no. 138 of 7 February 2018¹ on the modification of the Regulations on the application of apostille.

By the Government decision, the procedure of apostilating the diplomas

¹ Government of the Republic of Moldova. Decision no. 138 of February 7, 2019 regarding the completion of point 9 of the Regulation on the application of the apostille, February 9, 2019, available at <http://lex.justice.md/md/374190/>.

of the students of the higher education institutions in the Transnistrian region was facilitated, allowing them to continue their studies or to be employed in other countries on the basis of neutral diploma models. One year after the Government decision, in March 2019, about 240 documents were apostilled, with requests for countries such as Italy, Bulgaria, USA, and France².

Although the apostille does not represent the *de jure* recognition of the study documents, but rather the confirmation of their authenticity, the procedure itself is a first step in the process of legalization of the diplomas. Therefore, it is essential for the government authorities to ensure that there are no exemptions from quality assurance standards in tertiary education. We refer here to the procedures for accreditation and evaluation of the bachelor, master and doctoral programmes of the educational institutions on the left bank of the Nistru, which should correspond to the legislative framework of the Republic of Moldova. In this regard, the authorities could ask the representatives of Tiraspol to form a joint commission with international expertise to participate in the accreditation process of the programmes in question. Only under such conditions, the apostille of the diplomas will not lead to the application of double standards in the field of education.

In response to the protocol decisions negotiated and assumed by the Government in the field of education,

² One year after the first apostilles of the diplomas issued by Tiraspol, April 4, 2019, available at <https://agora.md/stiri/55902/un-an-de-la-primele-apostilari-ale-diplomelor-de-studii-eliberate-la-tiraspol--iata-cat-de-solicitat-a-fost-serviciul>.

the Transnistrian side was to facilitate the functioning of the Moldovan schools with teaching in the Latin script on the left bank of the Nistru by lowering the tariffs for the communal services, establishing symbolic payments for the renting of buildings on the basis of ten-year rental contracts, the use of the land on which the schools are located, ensuring the free movement of teachers and students based on student cards and teacher IDs and the provision of schools with teaching materials and other necessary goods³.

The implementation of these provisions was partial and strictly conditioned by the so-called legislation of the Tiraspol authorities. It is about excessive and unmotivated controls of the students and teaching staff, but also of the goods and teaching materials carried for the schools on the left bank of the Nistru. Also, the signed rental contracts can be modified unilaterally by the authorities of the region⁴, what is a pressure and blackmail tool for the administrations of the schools teaching in Romanian.

Although certain premises were created for the improvement of the education process in the schools with teaching in the Romanian language on the left bank of the Nistru, Chisinau failed to obtain the agreement of the Tiraspol authorities not to interfere in the daily activity of these institutions. The law enforcement agencies in the region continue to exert pressure and intimidation on the educational institutions⁵, including on the teaching staff and the students'

³ The political representatives of Chisinau and Tiraspol signed four protocol decisions aimed at solving major problems, November 25, 2017, available at <https://gov.md/ro/content/reprezentantii-politici-din-partea-chisinaului-si-tiraspolului-au-semnat-4-decizii>.

⁴ For more details see Ion Tăbărtă, Veaceslav Berbeca, Evaluation of the implementation of protocol decisions in education, June 2018, IDIS Viitorul, at <http://viitorul.org/files/4.%20Evaluarea%20implement%C4%83rii%20deciziilor%20protocolare%20din%20educa%C8%9Bie.pdf>.

⁵ For more details, see the Report "Human Rights in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova: July - December 2018", Promo-Lex, 2019, available at https://promolex.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Raport_NED_7_12_2018_OM.pdf.

parents. On this dimension, the government officials should insist on the application of conditionalities on the Transnistrian side related to the observance of the self-administration of the schools teaching in the Romanian language in strict connection with the file of the apostille of neutral diplomas.

2. Transport, telecommunications and infrastructure

In the field of transport, the issue of neutral number plates was one of the most popularized topics of the "Berlin Plus" Package. This was due to the strategic importance of this area for the smooth functioning of the region's economy, but also for the physical entities established in the region. At the same time, it was essential for Chisinau to find a method to count the number of cars registered in the Transnistrian region as well as to establish the identity of the physical and legal entities in whose property they are.

According to the protocol Decision "Regarding the access to the international road traffic of the means of transport of the Transnistrian region that do not carry out commercial activities"⁶, signed on 24 April 2018 in the town of Bender, there has been agreed the mechanism by which the cars registered on the left bank of the Nistru can obtain neutral plates for their access to the international space. The procedure in question involves the issue of neutral plates with "MD" sticker as a result of the registration process of the transport units in the subdivisions of the Public Service Agency of the towns of Tiraspol and Râbnîța, starting from the 1st of September 2018.

According to the Activity Report presented at the end of 2018 by the Reintegration Bureau, about 2200 people have requested registration certificates and another 3,000 citizens were on the

⁶ https://gov.md/sites/default/files/decizie_protocolara_cu_privire_la_participarea_autovehiculelor_din_regiunea_transnistreana_in_traficul_international.pdf.

waiting lists. In this regard, we can see an increased interest from among the drivers on the left bank of the Nistru in accessing this service, with a processing rate of 650 applications per month.

The file of the neutral number plates was characterized by a series of concessions by Chisinau. First of all, it is not clear why the authorities of the Republic of Moldova did not use the discussion format to impose, at least, the use of neutral number plates also for the cars driving on the right bank of the Nistru. Maintaining the same traffic regime for the territory of the right bank of the Nistru will not allow the road police to identify the drivers who commit offenses on the territory controlled by the Moldovan authorities. Secondly, the agreed decision does not advance the reintegration process and rather strengthens the *de facto* sovereignty of the Tiraspol regime. In this respect, it is difficult to anticipate the extent to which the decision adopted can energize the process of negotiations on basket 2 and 3 as long as the instruments for harmonizing the legislation and policies implemented on both banks of the Nistru are missing.

On the telecommunications segment, the protocol decision "On measures to organize the interaction in the field of telecommunications" mentions that the parties undertake to take the necessary actions to ensure the interconnection of the mobile, fixed and Internet telephony between both banks of the Nistru. The document expressly states that the authorities of the Republic of Moldova undertake to find legal and technical solutions to facilitate this endeavour. This happened through the draft Law for amending article 97 of the Law on electronic communications no. 241/2007⁷ of November 15, 2018, through which the National Agency for Regulation in Electronic Communications and Information Technology (ANRCETI) was granted the right "to limit, with the

⁷ <http://parlament.md/ProcesulLegislativ/Proiectedeacteleislative/tabid/61/LegislativId/4466/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx>.

agreement of the license holder, the territory on which the license for the use of radio channels or frequencies is valid, by excluding the territorial-administrative units from the left bank of the Nistru and the municipality of Bender⁸.

In other words, ANRCETI was empowered to negotiate with the license holders (i.e. Orange Moldova and Moldcell) to renounce the use of the 800 MHz frequency band on the territory of the Transnistrian region in favour of the local operator Interdnestrkom (IDC). The latter has been operating in violation of the legal framework of the Republic of Moldova in the Transnistrian region for 15 years⁹, after the Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional the Government Decision no. 782-37 of July 8, 2004, through which IDC was issued a license for the provision of cellular mobile services until July 15, 2019 and for the provision of local fixed telephony services until July 15, 2009¹⁰.

Under the current conditions, the Government of the Republic of Moldova will either have to pay financial compensations to Orange Moldova and Moldcell operators for the ceding of the frequency band, or to agree an alternative solution by which to extend the license validity term of the two operators for a period of up to 5 years in accordance with the legal provisions in force. In both cases, the authorized institutions

8 Idem

9 <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=291759>.

10 Idem

should ensure that the conditions of free competition on the telecommunications market are respected.

The reopening of the Gura Bâcului - Bâcioc bridge was made possible by the Protocol Decision "On the opening of the bridge over the Nistru River near the villages of Gura Bâcului and Bâcioc"¹¹ signed on November 3, 2017. According to the document, the reopening of the Gura Bâcului - Bâcioc bridge was agreed starting with 20 November 2017, thus facilitating the road traffic on the international route Iasi - Odessa. Starting with January 31, 2018, the traffic regime for vehicles from 3.5 to 10 tons has been extended. According to a feasibility study conducted the same year, it was established that the bridge could be used even for trucks of up to 25 tonnes. On the security dimension, the parties undertook not to use the bridge and the related areas for military purposes. These restrictions do not refer to the customs control exercised by the authorities of the region.

2. Human rights (property rights)

The situation of the agricultural land owned by the farmers from the villages of Cocieri, Pererîta, Pogrebia, Doroțcaia, Moldovata Nouă, Vasilevca and Coșnița, located beyond the Râbnița-Tiraspol road, was discussed at the meeting from

11 <https://gov.md/ro/content/reprezentantii-politici-de-la-chisinau-si-tiraspol-au-semnat-decizia-protocolara-privind>

November 25, 2017. The agreement between the parties mentions the return to the 2016 mechanism, which stipulates that more than 5500 owners will have access to the agricultural land after requesting and receiving the annual provisional registration certificates from the local authorities in Dubasari¹². The terms agreed in 2017 - 2018 indicate that the duration of the provisional registration certificates is 20 years, thus cancelling the illegal restrictions imposed on this issue by the Tiraspol authorities in 2014. The data presented at the end of 2018 by the Reintegration Bureau show that provisional certificates were issued for about 88% of the area of 5714 hectares of agricultural land.

The sectoral working groups should continue the consultations on this issue in order to ensure the full rights of farmers to sign contracts for the sale or lease of land plots. The illegal bureaucratic procedures imposed by the Transnistrian side must be limited and canceled in the coming years. Any restriction, including providing temporary access to the agricultural land owned by farmers, is a violation of their right to property.

(The full version of the Policy Brief can be accessed on www.ipre.md)

12 The Government of the Republic of Moldova, the Protocol Decision "On some measures to regulate the problems related to the realization of the 2006 Mechanism" regarding the use of agricultural land located in Dubasari district, following the Tiraspol - Camenca road", https://gov.md/sites/default/files/2017_11_25_protokolnoe_reshenie_o_realizatii_mehanizma_2006_g_o_ispolzovanii_selhozugodiy.pdf.

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