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Evolution in Moldovan security sector. Prospects for the future



Moldova's security sector went through a prolonged period of a stagnation due to the political disengagement. The 2014 Russian intervention in Ukraine was a wake-up call to rethink the security policy.

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Editor in Chief:
Olga Chyzhova

Editorial Board:
Nikolaos Gavalakis
Richard Giragosian
Vugar Bairamov
Arseny Sivitsky
Lasha Tugushi
Victoria Bucataru
Olga Melykh
Sergiy Gerasymchuk

Contacts:
info@prismua.org
www.prismua.org/
eap-think-bridge

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Who needs an army?

A bold statement made by the President of Moldova who declared that the state is neutral and therefore does not need an army at all, yet again drew attention to the security sector in the Eastern Partnership countries.

The defence sector has long been on the fringes of attention as it did not promise considerable political dividends. Budgets of the armed forces were cut and reforms were postponed. When it comes to Moldova, its usual reasons for an Eastern Partnership country to put off major changes were aided by domestic contradictions between the President on one side and the government along with the Parliament – on the other side.

How Moldova is moving towards reforming its defence institutions, who stands in its way and which lessons can be learnt in the process by other countries of the Eastern Partnership – all these issues were addressed by Danu Marin from Foreign Policy Association of Moldova.

In Belarus the army was in the spotlight as well: a death of the conscript instigated a new round of contradictions between security forces.

Armenia as well decided to pay attention to its defence sector and in October it passed a law that changes the draft call, at the same time increasing the spendings for the Armed Forces in the new budget. Meanwhile, the meeting of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan was a new attempt to solve the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh by diplomatic, and not military means.

Ukrainian diplomacy demonstrated a positive result: with the support of Turkish partners, Crimean Tatar Mejlis leaders, that had been convicted by occupational Russian authorities in the Crimea, were released.

As for Georgia, the main battles of the month took place in political fields, where «Georgian Dream» in fact won this fight for almost monopolistic local power.

Our traditional reviews include all the main developments of the month in the region of the Eastern Partnership.

Olga Chyzhova,
Editor in Chief
EaP Think Bridge Digest

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Armenia: Tentative return to diplomacy

Richard Giragosyan, Regional Studies Center (Armenia, Yerevan)

Despite an important, yet still tentative resumption of the diplomatic engagement over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with an Armenian-Azerbaijani presidential summit meeting in Geneva, the domestic developments in Armenia, including the draft deferments ceasing and a planned increase in the defense spending, only suggested a much more cautious approach. At the same time, some pressure mounted over the dramatic price rises for the key commodities and staple foodstuffs, although even that failed to ease the Armenian government's overly ambitious and the optimistic projects for the economic growth through 2018.



Armenian Prime Minister Karen Karapetian met with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.
Photo by gov.am.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Armenia ceases draft deferments

In a widely expected vote, the Armenian parliament formally ended the process of the temporary deferments offering from the obligatory two-year military conscription. The draft deferments, largely extended to the draft-age male students with the state scholarships, were designed to provide the gifted students with a two-year compulsory service after completing their undergraduate, graduate or post-graduate studies. The move will replace these deferments with a reduced option for the students to delay their

service in exchange for completing the parallel military training and serving as officers for three years after the graduation.

The opposition “Yelk” (“Exit”) bloc opposed [the 27. October vote](#), charging that it would only prevent many students from becoming scientists or scholars and would fail to curb the practice for sons and relatives of many senior government officials and wealthy businesspeople from evading the military service. The revised law is to come into effect in January, 2021, thereby not impacting students holding deferments.

ECONOMY

Prices for basic staples soar as defense spending increase

The ordinary Armenian citizens were hit hard by a [dramatic spike](#) in the prices for the basic staples goods in early October, with an increase of more than 20% in prices for butter and meat in the previous ten days alone. The price rise was also seen in other foodstuffs, as prices for beef and lamb soared by roughly 25% and pork cost about 2,600 drams (\$5.40), up from 1,600-1,800 drams in August. Butter, which is largely imported from New Zealand, sold for about 4,000 drams per kilo (\$8.27), up from an average price of 2,800 drams. According to the state anti-trust regulator, the State Commission for the Protection of Economic Competition (SCPEC), the increases were tied to a global surge in prices, although little statistical evidence was provided.

Reflecting the priority of the defense and security issues for the Armenian government, the officials [announced](#) their plans to significantly increase the defense spending in 2018. The planned 17% increase, which would increase the defense spending to about \$515 million for the next year, would be used to procure new weapons and equipment, primarily relying on the discounted arms from Russia.

Foreign investor pulls out of mining project

In an announcement dated 26, October, the Denmark's Export Credit Agency (EKF) withdrew its export credit guarantee for a \$62 million investment in the Armenia's second largest copper mine, accusing the private owner Vallex Group of failing to comply with the environmental standards. The mining project, set up in Teghut in 2014, was opposed by the local environmental groups for its open-pit mining operations that were reportedly responsible for the destruction of hundreds of hectares of the nearby forest. The \$380 million project of the copper and molybdenum

mining is largely financed by the Russian commercial bank VTB, which extended the loans to the Vallex Group, including \$62 million in financing from a Danish pension fund. The mining sector traditionally accounted for about 45% of the Armenian exports, with copper, molybdenum and other non-ferrous metals, as well as their ore concentrates as the country's primary source of the Armenia's export revenue.

Denmark's Export Credit Agency (EKF) withdrew its export credit guarantee for a \$62 million investment in Armenia's second largest copper mine

Armenia committed to nuclear energy

In his comments in late October, the Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian stated that the country remains committed to relying on the nuclear energy but is seeking the ways to finance the construction of a new nuclear facility to replace its aging nuclear power plant, the only one in the region. Noting the significance of the Russian-managed nuclear power plant, whose one operational reactor accounts for 31% of the total electricity produced in 2016, the president has pledged to build a new facility, although the roughly [\\$5 billion estimated cost](#) for a new nuclear power plant has failed to attract investors. The Soviet-era reactor has been operational since 1980, but is well beyond its 30-year design life, prompting some concerns and calls for its closure.

Meanwhile, according to the new 2018 state budget presented to the Parliament on 30, October, the Armenian government raised its projections for the economic growth to an ambitious 4.5% in open defiance of the most independent forecasts, including [the International Monetary Fund](#), which envisions more modest growth rates of 3.5% in 2017 and 2.9% in 2018. The proposed budget includes some \$3.1 billion in total spending, representing an increase of some 7.6% from the government's 2017 spending target.

FOREIGN POLICY

Armenian Prime Minister visits Iran

[Concluding a state visit](#), the Armenian Prime Minister Karen Karapetian met with the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on 10, October to wrap up the talks aimed at expanding the bilateral trade and implementing the planned projects in the energy and transport sectors. The talks over the energy issues focused on the planned construction of a new power transmission line to significantly increase the Armenian electricity exports to Iran and the outlook for the greater Armenian imports of the Iranian natural gas, with an additional discussion of the Armenian plans to create a "free economic zone" along the southern Armenian-Iranian border, promising Iran tariff-free access to the markets in Russia and the other members of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). The bilateral trade remains fairly modest, however, at a meager \$173.5 million in the first eight months of this year, with Iran accounting for less than 5% of the Armenia's overall foreign trade.

New Armenia-EU agreement

Following a visit to Armenia by Johannes Hahn, the EU commissioner for the European neighborhood policy, [earlier in the month](#), the Armenian and the EU officials each voiced their optimism saying that the [new Armenia-](#)

[EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement \(CEPA\)](#) could be ready for signature "during or on the sidelines" of a 24, November EU summit in Brussels. Despite the concerns that the [CEPA](#) may be delayed for the technical reasons, there are few worries that the agreement cannot be signed by the end of the year. The new, roughly 350-page document is designed to deepen the Armenia's political and economic ties with the EU, and replaces the earlier Association Agreement that Armenia was forced to sacrifice in 2013 under the Russian pressure. Unlike that earlier Association Agreement, the full text of the new agreement was officially [released on 16, October](#).

Armenian-Azerbaijani presidential summit

In what was described as a "[constructive meeting](#)", October the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan pledged to "intensify" the peace process seeking a negotiated resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and agreed to "reduce tensions" and "bolster" the ceasefire regime. More importantly, the presidents also committed to participating and leading the "working sessions" on a ministerial level through the coming months aimed at advancing the stalled peace process. The summit meeting of the presidents is the first such encounter since two brief but inconclusive meetings in mid-2016.

Azerbaijan: Human rights in the spotlight

Vugar Bayramov, Center for Economic and Social Development (Azerbaijan, Baku)

Human rights issues yet again ruled the agenda in Azerbaijan. On the one hand, the amendments to the domestic legislation restricted the options for the civil activists to have legal representatives in the courts. On the other hand, the issue arouse new tensions in the relations with the European partners.



The opening ceremony of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway.
Photo by president.az.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Less advocates for activists

The Parliamentary Committee on the Legal Policy and State Building proposed the amendments to the Civil Procedure Code, the Administrative Procedure Code and the Law on Advocacy. The proposed changes are related to the abolition of the legal representative offices in the courts. The individuals with no Bar membership or license for the advocate activity will

not be able to protect the people rights in the courts. The changes are understood as “adopting the European practice” by the lawmakers. Although in the recent years, the licenses of many advocates, who protected the rights of the political and civil society activists, were cancelled. According to the former legislation, they still could continue to practice. The new legislation eliminates this possibility.

ECONOMY

Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway launched

The long-awaited [launch of the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway](#) has happened.

This railway will create the additional freight and passenger link between Europe and China and boost the regional cooperation between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. The railway is attractive for the international actors because it creates a Europe – China link, avoiding Iran and Russia. The event was attended by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Prime Ministers of Georgia, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.

FOREIGN POLICY

Azerbaijan – Council of Europe relations

On 4, October, 28 Ambassadors of the EU countries and several high-ranking EEAS officials visited Azerbaijan. The Political and Security Committee (PSC) Delegation had meetings with the President Aliyev, the Head of Parliament Ogtay Asadov and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov. This is another positive step toward the EU-Azerbaijan reapproachment since the President Aliyev's official visit to Brussels in February, 2017.

Although despite the positive trends in the EU-Azerbaijani relations, the past month witnessed many unexpected events in the Council of Europe and Azerbaijan.

Following the revelations of the alleged corrupt relations between the Azerbaijani and the Council of Europe officials, and European parliament officials calling for an investigation into the case, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe formally notified the government of Azerbaijan of its intention to launch the legal action related to the implementation of the [Ilgar Mammadov vs. Azerbaijan](#) judgment from the European Court of Human Rights.

In May, 2014 the court ruled that the head of the oppositional ReAL movement Mr. Ilgar Mammadov's arrest was in violation of the several articles of the European Convention on Human Rights. So far, the government of Azerbaijan did not release him, which triggered some additional steps by the Committee of Ministers. By 29, November, 2017 the government of

The economy started stabilization process

The oil prices started normalizing and some further rise is expected. Despite the conventional wisdom of the continuation of the low oil price era, [the independent assessment of the oil supplies](#) presents a different picture. For its new annual budget in 2018, Azerbaijan also raised expectations regarding the oil prices. The average annual oil price is forecasted at \$45.

[The increase and stabilization of the oil prices](#) helped the government of Azerbaijan to stabilize the economy. Due to the expected oil revenue for 2018, it increased the spending from the oil fund and intends to start some new projects.

Azerbaijan has to present its written vision on the issue. In case of the refusal to implement the European Human Rights Court decision by the government of Azerbaijan, the Committee of Ministers will launch a procedure sending a request to the European Court of Human Rights on whether the non-implementation of its ruling is a further violation of the convention, or not.

European parliament is calling for an investigation into the case of alleged corrupt relations between Azerbaijani and Council of Europe officials

New presidential meeting

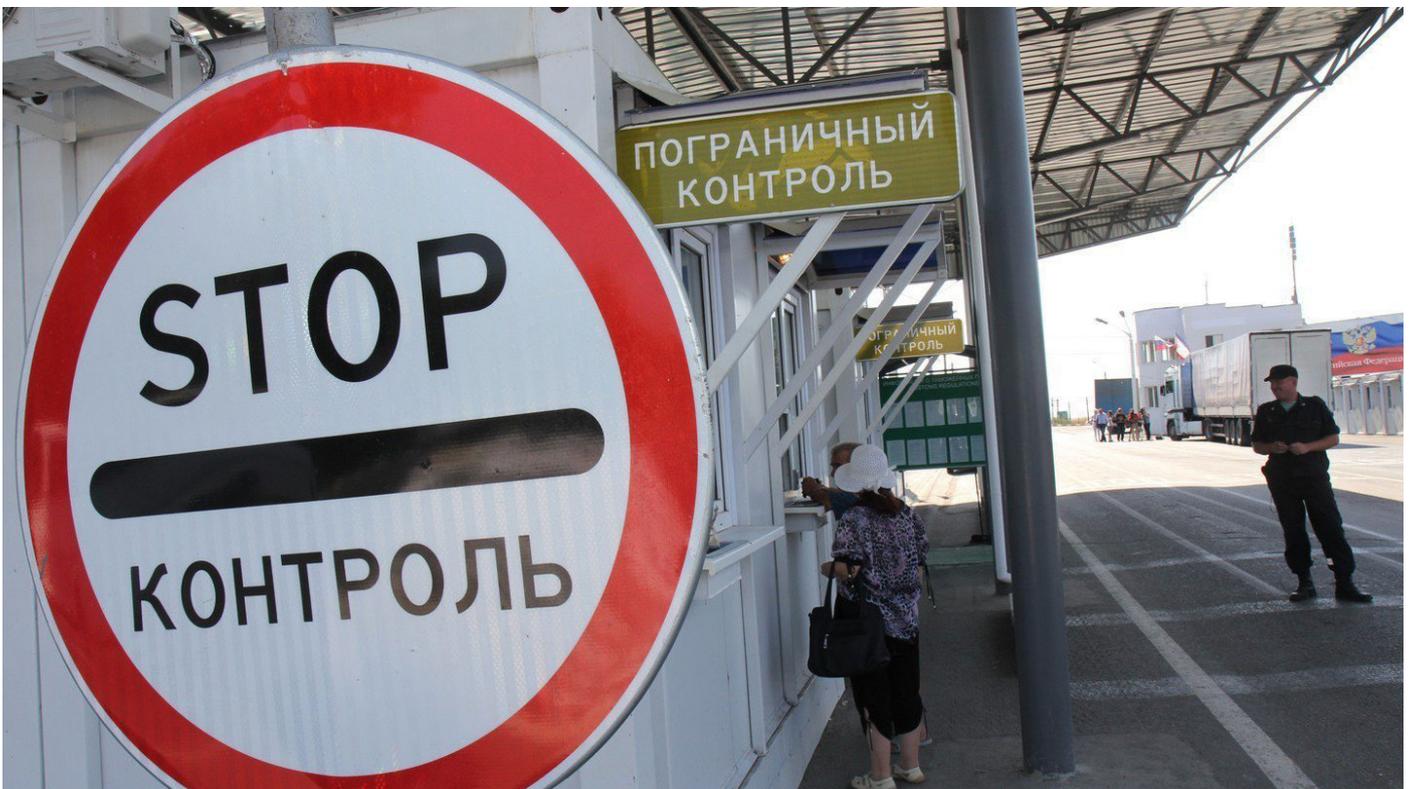
On 16, October the Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian and the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev had [a meeting in Geneva](#). Following the meeting, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of both countries and the co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Minsk Group expressed their agreement on the intensified negotiations and the de-escalating of the military tension at the contact line between the Armenian and the Azerbaijani Armed Forces.

These event comes after a pause of the meetings between the presidents. They had just two meetings in the post-April 2016 war. This one is a chance for both sides to reconnect once more and find new opportunities for peace.

Belarus: Fighting for operation space

Yury Tsarik, Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies (Belarus, Minsk)

When a soldier died on one of its military bases, this situation again drew attention to the contradictions among the security forces of Belarus. Yet its tensions with Russia continue to influence both the country's economy and its behaviour on the international arena.



No later than May, 2018 the Russian authorities are launching the temporary border control points on the Belarusian-Russian border.

Photo by politonline.ru.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Conflict among security officials

The main October political developments took place in the staff field. After 5, October news that a private Alexandr Korzhych [died on a military base](#) that served as a training center for the warrant officers and junior specialists in the town of Pechy, a campaign aimed at revealing the circumstances of this case was launched

in the public space. Despite this military base being notorious for some problems related to the military hazing and bullying, at first the Ministry of Defence chose a strategy of ignoring the allegations. The investigative committee of Belarus supported this strategy by declaring a suicide version as the most probable one.

Some circumstances of the situation around the Korzhych's death signaled that the campaign against

the Ministry of Defense of Belarus may not only be a demonstration of the public initiative, but also a [staff attack](#). For instance, an important role in the crisis dynamics escalating was played by the untimely statements made by the representatives of the investigative committee, with the petition calling for the resignation of the Defence Minister Andrei Raukou published on 11, October exactly when the minister and the Belarusian President were absent in Belarus, and on top of that, it was most poorly prepared. It is remarkable that the resignation demand was not made by the opposing politicians, which, in principle, should have been interested in accumulating the political capital, but by

the Gomel advocates whose activity is usually directed at solving some specific issues and problems.

In the middle of the campaign, dealing a heavy blow to the Ministry of Defence, the President Lukashenko had a meeting with the security forces representatives. During the meeting the head of the state made several serious claims to the law enforcement bodies and special forces, regarding both their professional activities and corruption amongst them. The meeting resulted in [the Operative-Analytical Centre management](#) being dismissed and stopping to fulfil its obligations, and the Minister of Internal Affairs, [according to the independent mass media](#), hospitalization for a short term.

ECONOMY

Back to future reforms?

The negative dynamics in the relations with Russia and a present opportunity to further deepen its relations with the EU push Belarus to enlarge its own space in order to be able to maneuver and provide more solid economic stability. This imperative results in Minsk having an agenda of the economic reforms, which were [temporarily rejected in the middle of 2017](#) when the IMF talks came to a halt. The 2016 results showed that despite the foreign economy recovery and the outrunning export growth the state sector of economy did not become more stable and successful. The debt obligations acquired earlier prove to be impossible to service under the new conditions. For example, in October a new portion of the state support was given to “Gomselmash”.

The cross-subsidies liquidation remains the main issue on the Belarusian authorities agenda. Not only is this step required by the IMF, this is also exactly what the current situation the Belarusian economy finds itself in demands. However, when solving this issue the authorities are forced to balance between the economic interests, on the one hand, and a fear of the people’s dissatisfaction resulting in protests, on the other hand.

In October Aleksandr Lukashenko had to publicly

correct the government plans to increase the tariffs for housing and public utilities services. According to the President, these plans should be synchronized with the growth of wages in the Belarusian economy. This position, however, does not only reflect his care for the social and political stability but also the mistrust of the Belarusian authorities to such mechanism of the social policy as the address housing subsidies. In the course of the meeting on the housing and public utilities services, the President demanded to widen a list of reasons for providing such subsidies on the ba-

Russia demands a full control over crossing the entire Belarusian border, as well as a tougher implementation of the Russian limitations on entrance of the third country citizens by the Belarusian side

sis of a detecting principle.

In the meantime the authorities are going for [the higher wages and pensions](#), despite the record-setting low price growth in the economy. The [prices for petrol, gas](#) and [public transport](#) in Minsk increased simultaneously. It is obvious that social dissatisfaction becomes one of the permanent factors for the economic and political dynamics in the foreseeable perspective in Belarus.

FOREIGN POLICY

Preparing for new shocks

In the meantime, October was marked by the escalation of an entire range of the “old” controversial issues in the Belarus–Russia relations. Several Russian officials including Yury Chaika, [the Prosecutor General of Russia](#), and Aleksandr Gorovoy, the Russian Deputy

Minister of Internal Affairs, simultaneously made a statement on the issue of the border between Belarus and Russia. According to them, an open border allegedly contributes to the drugs inflow to Russia, as well as lowers the security level with regard to the counteractions to terrorism. This is the reason why not later than May, 2018 the Russian authorities are launching

the temporary border control points on the Belarusian-Russian border (with the border control points both on the highways and railways) due to the Football World Cup taking place in Russia. Such developments will hit hard the “grey economy” related transborder entrepreneurial activities conducted by the people living in the Eastern regions of Belarus. And this, in its turn, will facilitate a dramatic escalation of the tensions in these regions.

In order to prevent such developments Minsk can only agree [to implement the general migration and visa policy](#), which is a step the Belarusian authorities are ready to make. The problem remains, however, that Minsk and Moscow perceive such actions in a different way. If Belarus believes that a full exchange of information on visas and residence permits issued is a sufficient measure, Russia, on the contrary, demands a full control over crossing the entire Belarusian border, as well as a tougher implementation of the Russian limitations on entrance of the third country citizens by the Belarusian side. These requests made by Kremlin are absolutely unacceptable for Belarus.

The Russian side also continued its pressure regarding the issue of the redirecting transit of the Be-

larusian oil products from the Lithuanian and Latvian ports to the Russian ones. [Some statements made by the Russian participants](#) during the negotiations made an impression of Minsk being “ready” for serious concessions in this sphere. However, such steps may cause some image and international policy aftermath that is unlikely to be acceptable for Belarus.

October was also marked by the Moscow’s proactive position on its favourite field of the “trade battles”. This time the Russian authorities aimed at [apples, tomatoes, meat and dairy produce](#) imported from Belarus. The Russian combine manufacturers also [turned to the authorities for help](#) to protect the market from the Belarusian goods.

However, against this backdrop the relations of Belarus and the EU can be characterized as quite optimistic. The President of Belarus Lukashenko was [personally invited](#) to Brussels for the Eastern Partnership Summit on 24, November, and the Belarusian government revealed its ambitious plans to intensify the export to the EU countries. The sociological survey [results demonstrated](#) that the people of Belarus trust the European Union more than the Eurasian Economic Union Belarus is a member of and this is a quite important telling signal.

Georgia: Local rise for Georgian Dream

Lasha Tughushi, “Liberal Academy Tbilisi” Foundation (Georgia, Tbilisi)

The results of the October local elections proved the weakness of the mixed electoral system for the Georgian realities, effectively establishing the monopoly of one party for power in the regions and launching the presidential election company. At the same time, in the international economic ratings, Georgia again improved its positions. And on the international arena it strengthens relations with the European partners.



Kakha Kaladze with his considerable financial, administrative and domestic party support secured his victory in Tbilisi mayor elections already in the first round.

Photo by 41.ge.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Monopoly on local power

Securing a landslide victory in the aftermath of the local elections in October, the Georgian Dream party won almost in all the constituencies including both proportional representation and majority election principles. [Four parties were able to make it](#) to the local representative body – Sakrebulo – according to the principle of the proportional representation, namely: the Georgian Dream as the winner with 53.15% of votes, the Saakashvili’s party United Na-

tional Movement (UNM) with 17.66% votes, a UNM splinter party the European Georgia (9.18%) and the anti-NATO Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (5.62%). The remaining twelve parties and electoral blocs were not able to pass the 4% threshold and did not make it to Sakrebulo.

The Central Election Commission decided to host a second round of the elections in the self-governing city of Kutaisi and the self-governing communities of Kazbegi, Khashuri, Borjomi, Ozurgeti, and Martvili on 12, November. Tbilisi, the capital, became the main trophy. The main in-

trigue could have been the second round including Alexander Elisashvili, a runner-up independent candidate. Famous for his free-spokenness and loved by the Tbilisi residents, the former journalist got 17.48% of votes, having overcome the powerful party machines but for one exception—the Georgian Dream and its favorite Kakha Kaladze. In case of making it to the second round, Elisashvili might have received the support of the other parties' followers. However, Kaladze, with his considerable financial, administrative and domestic party support secured his victory already in the first round with 51.09% of votes.

One against all approach have already been tried. [The revised Constitution](#) adopted by the Parliament in the third reading in October became an example of the same political battle with the only difference of both the civil society and the President of Georgia joining the political parties. However, this battle was yet again won by the Georgian Dream with adopting the Constitution and therefore overcoming all the difficulties.

The local elections yet again demonstrated the toxicity of the mixed

electoral system for the Georgian reality. In Tbilisi alone the Georgian Dream got fifteen seats by the proportional representation, whereas three other parties finished with a total of ten seats. It was again the Georgian Dream that won in all 25 majority constituencies. To sum it all up, the results were the following: forty seats out of fifty were taken by one party and ten seats – by remaining three parties.

Such results came as yet another proof that constitutional changes regarding the complete transit to the proportional representation from 2024 instead of 2020 is nothing but an attempt made by the ruling authorities to keep their positions for four more years.

Despite the fact that the second round of the elections is yet to take place, the preparations have already been made for the coming presidential elections. According to the new Constitution, the next president is going to be the last ruler elected by direct vote.

The local elections yet again demonstrated the toxicity of the mixed electoral system for the Georgian reality

ECONOMY

Better ratings

In the [Doing Business rating](#) the Best European Countries for Business 2017 rating of the independent non-governmental organization the European Chamber) Georgia improved its performance by 7 points, now showing a record ranking of 9th against 16th.

The Head of the Government made a statement on the matter that was quite optimistic: “Georgia is among the top ten countries on the ease of doing business rating. We understand that this will not make an immediate impact on the country’s population, however, it is extremely important that the citizens know about their future prospects”.

Another considerable positive change can be seen in Starting a Business rating, according to which Georgia is ranked 4th against 8th previous year, while its Resolving Insolvency rating went up from 106 to 57 due to the implementing its sentencing reforms.

Yet the Western Georgia faced a serious agricultural challenge—a small bug caused major difficulties both for the local farmers and the authorities. [The Asian stink bug](#) is a type of bug damaging almost all kinds of crops, as well as berries, fruits and vegetables. It was first recorded in Samegrelo in 2015. This agricultural pest caused considerable damage to nuts, corn, soya, mulberry, and vegetables. However, the bug is dangerous for all plants and is an insect able to spread diseases.

According to the Georgian Ministry of Agriculture, a scientific and consulting group was created to fight the bug, the group is to examine the issue of bringing in the brown marmorated stink bug’s (or the Asian bug’s) biological enemy, as well as to study the experience of the other countries fighting the same problem and apply it to the Georgian conditions. The Ministry of Agriculture is to spend 14 mln lari fighting the Asian stink bug in 2018.

FOREIGN POLICY

Without EU but with Great Britain

“As I never tire of saying, and as the Prime Minister Theresa May never tires of saying—we may be leaving the EU, but we are not leaving Europe, and we regard the Euro-Atlantic vocation of Georgia as being one of the key ambitions of our policy”, [British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson told](#) his Georgian counterpart, the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Mikheil Janelidze in London.

The United Kingdom always acted as a trustworthy partner for Georgia. According to Boris Johnson, the UK is interested in developing its cooperation with Georgia in many fields, and his visit to Georgia is planned for the nearest future. In his opinion, it is essential for the European continent to strengthen the Georgian security and defense.

As for the Vice Prime Minister of Georgia, he underlined the importance of the further developing of partnership and friendship with the United Kingdom, and stated that Georgia is interested in the developing of a bilateral legal format of the agreements with the UK, including free trade.

Moldova: A setback on reform agenda

Victoria Bucataru, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova (APE) (Moldova, Chisinau)

On the domestic level this October was marked with a new controversial precedent after the Constitutional Court's decision that had interpreted an institutional blockage between the President and the Government and the Parliament. The foreign policy debate focused on the potential outcomes of the Eastern Partnership Summit, and also Moldova became a subject of the debates in the European Parliament. Moreover, the Moldovan government was notified about the pause in the budget support payments for the certain policy areas due to the insufficient commitment for the reform agenda.



Appointing new minister of Defense, Eugen Sturza, triggered battles between the President and the Speaker of the Parliament. Photo by army.md.

DOMESTIC POLICY

The Constitutional Court strikes again

The designated Minister of Defense Eugen Sturza was sworn in on 24, October after several public and institutional battles between the President Igor Dodon and the Speaker of the Parliament Adrian Candu. Although Sturza was proposed twice by the Prime Min-

ister, Dodon refused to name him a candidate thus the situation became a target for the Constitutional Court's (CC) judgment. The CC interpreted the President's veto as a serious violation: his [obligations under the Constitution](#) are resumed to the right to check the eligibility. In this situation, the institutional blockage was solved by [suspending the President Dodon](#) from this particular issue, with his responsibilities

taken over by the Moldovan Speaker. [The reaction of the President](#) came shortly, stressing the lack of the CC authority to institute any new constitutional norms. In conclusion, the assignment of the Defense Minister resulted in more political overtones related

to the future 2018 parliamentary elections positioning between the Democratic Party and the Socialists Party than the genuine necessity of having a strong figure as a leader of a Ministry with a strategic value for the defense sector.

FOREIGN POLICY

Debates on Moldova in the European Parliament

At the beginning of October, the members of the European Parliament took stock of the work in progress made by Moldova under the Association agreement. Two resolutions on Moldova proposed by the European Socialists and the European People's Party (EPP) were debated. The European Socialists referred mostly to the need of reducing considerably the domestic political fight among the main political actors while the EPP emphasized the decrees of the democratic standards, recently proven by [the change of the electoral system](#) despite the [negative conclusions of the Venice Commission](#). Some European [MPs addressed the shortcomings](#) in the field of rule of law and independent justice (impartial legal system, lack of willingness to recover the money stolen from the banking system, media freedom and freedom of opinion restrictions) as major conditionality to be put in place for the further financial

disbursements. However, other European MPs mentioned the geopolitical challenge, namely the Russian factor that should be taken into account in the EU-Moldova dialogue.

On 25-26, October at the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee in Strasbourg, the message was reinforced. Moldova was requested [to continue the reform agenda](#) including the fight against the corruption at a higher level; focus on the full implementation of the justice reform strategy, as well as avoiding the polarization of the society in the parliamentary election year.

These two events unfolded several weeks before the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels (24, November).

The assignment of the Defense Minister resulted in more political overtones related to future 2018 parliamentary elections positioning between the Democratic Party and the Socialists Party

ECONOMY

From words to actions

Following the discussions in the European Parliament, the EU cut the last financial transfer [under the justice reform program](#) (which is 28 million Euro) due to the [insufficient commitment](#) shown by the Moldovan

authorities in 2014-2015. The EU also paused the payments of the budget support in another four policy areas thus emphasizing [the change of perception](#), as mentioned by Commissar Hahn, that EU is supporting the people of Moldova and not the government.

Ukraine: New hopes for old partners

Oleksii Krysenko, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Ukraine, Kharkiv)

Despite some extremely negative developments in the Ukrainian domestic policy in October, the current economic and political model is still demonstrating the consistent stability. The most positive moment of the month might have come when the laws on the pension and medical reforms were passed, as well as the law on the special self-governance in the certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. With the discussions about the risks and benefits of these laws taken off the table, their very adoption demonstrated to both domestic and foreign observers that the Ukrainian Parliament has a majority able to pass the laws strategic for the state. Moreover, it is exactly this majority that implements a rather relevant cooperation with the Cabinet of Ministers and the President of Ukraine, which in its turn creates the institutional balance to continue the reforms.



The Crimean Tatar leaders and Mejlis representatives, who had been illegally detained in the occupied Crimea, were released.

Photo by president.gov.ua.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Deeper divide and higher stakes

A tendency for a deeper divide in the camp of the national democrats and a status of the irreconcilable opposition given to some members of this camp (first and foremost, to Samopomich (Self-reliance), Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) and Movement of the New Forces) significantly complicate the political power

configuration and destabilize the country's political situation in general. Fighting for the symbolic palm of victory of the “Donbas liberation” not only disorganizes the work of the Verkhovna Rada, but also devalues the Ukrainian influence on the foreign policy arenas. The minimal amount of MP votes needed to pass the law on the special self-governance in the certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well

as an acute conflict appearing when passing this law demonstrated that a similar one may not be passed in the future. And this becomes a certain moral risk for the country.

This month political culmination happened when the new protests took place at the building of the Parliament of Ukraine starting on 17, October with a political slogan of “To a big political reform!” and then transforming into a steady protest, which later took shape of a tent camp. The protests joined the opposition part of a national democratic camp into a long-term de-facto anti-presidential act. Mikhail Saakashvili raised the political stakes as high as possible organizing this protest and trying to get his “own political survival” and went for an all-or-nothing game: either the protest ends with the concessions made by the President and the ruling coalition or he is likely to be extradited to Georgia that has already happened to some of his followers.

The end of the month was marked by the Russian special forces intensifying their terror in regard to some Ukrainian public figures: on

Turkey became one of the Ukraine’s most influential foreign policy partners in the “southern direction”

25, October a murder attempt of MP Igor Moseichuk was made and on 30, October Amina Okueva, a famous public activist and an officer, was killed. These developments yet again point at the state of the legal system in the country and the efficiency of the general political management of its separate institutions (the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Security Service of Ukraine, the General Prosecutor’s Office etc.). A special place in this discussion belongs to the search and detention of Oleksandr Avakov, the son of the Ukraine’s Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, initiated by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) with regard to a “backpack case”. The NABU believes Oleksandr Avakov to be a suspect in the corruption scheme on supplying the National Guard with the backpacks. This detention signified a domestic divide in the ruling coalition and probably confirmed the conflict between the President and the Interior Minister.

ECONOMY

Growth continues

Despite certain risks in the politics, the Ukrainian economy is still steadily growing. Some economic growth corresponds to the higher social standards for the population. For instance, according to the pension reform adopted on 3, October the minimal pension in Ukraine increased to 1452 UAH (\$53).

Starting 1, October Ukraine got an opportunity to increase its duty-free export of the agricultural goods to the EU countries, since the EU three-year autonomic trade preferences for Ukraine entered into force; they include more duty-free quotas for those goods that are especially demanded by the Ukrainian exporters. It is also worth mentioning that Ukraine is one of the top ten agricultural suppliers to the European Union according to the results of the first 9 months of the year, that confirms a defined tendency of transforming Ukraine into the country of agricultural export.

The macroeconomic parameters and the conditions of the Ukrainian economy continue to improve against the previous period. Also, the Ukraine’s position in the international ratings became somewhat better. In the annual Doing Business Rating Ukraine went 4 points up and ranks 76th among 190 countries (comparing to the 2016 results Ukraine now sits the 80th place instead of the 83rd).

On 19, October the UK Global Sourcing Association (GSA) named Ukraine the best country providing the outsourcing services in 2017. According to the GSA experts, the main advantages of Ukraine are the fol-

lowing: a great number of highly qualified developers, competitive prices, and IT-infrastructure that is developing quite fast.

Financial stability

The National currency of Ukraine “hryvna” went down 1.3% to US dollar in a month (as of 30, October). Among the main factors of the hryvna’s devaluating pressure there are the following: a smaller currency supply among the population and a growing demand for the foreign currency among the importing enterprises (that are the fuel and energy complex, pharmaceutical industry and others). Yet the current dynamic is more optimistic since last month hryvna devaluated 3.7% to US dollar, while on 26, October the Board of the National Bank of Ukraine went for a tougher monetary policy in order to prevent further inflation and raised the level of the discount rate by 1 p. p. to 13.5%.

The Ukraine’s balance of payments in September had a surplus of \$637 mln. The net inflow to the financial account in September grew to \$1.6 bn. Real wages in September, 2017 increased by 1.3% against August, 2017, and went up 17.3% against August, 2016.

The Ukraine’s international reserves made up \$18.64 bn as of 1, October. Since the beginning of the year the Ukraine’s National Bank gold and foreign currency reserves went up 20% reaching a three-year maximum. As of 1, October the international reserves

volume covers 3.7 months of the future import and is enough to fulfill the Ukraine's obligations and the current operations of the government and the National Bank.

The IMF improved its forecast for the deficit of the current account of the Ukrainian balance for 2017 at the level of 3.3% GDP. Earlier in May the IMF made a forecast that this indicator would be 3.6% GDP.

Energy security

Within three quarters of 2017 gas transit through the Ukraine's gas transportation system made up 70.4

bn of cubic meters, which is 23.5% more than the transit volume of 9 months in 2016 and is a record indicator for the previous nine years.

The total gas volume in the underground storage facilities made up almost 17 bn of cubic meters by the beginning of the heating season, which is 2 bn of cubic meters more than the maximum volume of gas at the beginning of the heating season previous year.

Natural gas extraction in Ukraine increased by 3.7% (or by 400 mln of cubic meters against the same period in 2016) according to the results after three quarters. Now 42 mln of cubic meters of gas are extracted every 24 hours in Ukraine.

FOREIGN POLICY

Turkey as the most influential partner

On 9, October the President of Turkey Recep Erdogan visited Kyiv. It is worth noting that the presidential meeting with Poroshenko lasted for more than three hours instead of 45 minutes planned. Nine interstate documents were signed, including those on avoiding the double taxation. Turkey became one of the Ukraine's most influential foreign policy partners in the "southern direction". Moreover, a further release of the Crimean political prisoners with Turkey's decisive role in it confirms a rather deep level of the intergovernmental dialogue on the presidential level. The Ukrainian citizens Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chygoz, the Crimean Tatar leaders and Mejlis representatives, who had been illegally detained in the occupied Crimea, were released and flown to Turkey on 25, October. In Ankara they were put on a plane to Kyiv.

One of the most unpleasant developments of the Ukraine's foreign policy is its yet to be solved "language controversy" with Hungary. As a result, the

Hungarian partners claim they are ready to veto any initiatives regarding Ukraine in the EU. On 27, October the Hungary's Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that Hungary blocked the December meeting of Ukraine–NATO commission thus disconcertingly putting their bilateral relations in the Euroatlantic dimension. The "[language conflict](#)" needs to be resolved fast by seeking a mutually acceptable compromise.

On 11, October the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko delivered an address at the session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in the frames of his work visit to Strasbourg. This address had a very important symbolic significance for confirming the Ukraine's status as a predictable European partner ready to seek the solutions both to its military confrontation with Russia and to any difficulties that might arise with the Ukraine's neighbours.

On 17, October the President of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca paid a state visit to Kyiv following the Poroshenko's visit to Malta. The return visit aimed to further strengthen the bilateral intergovernmental relations, which had no real political content up to this year.

Evolution in Moldovan security sector. Prospects for the future

Danu Marin, Foreign Policy Association (Moldova, Chisinau)

Moldovan's security sector went through a prolonged period of a stagnation due to the political disengagement. Furthermore, the President in his October interview stated that Moldova as a neutral country does not require a national Army at all. But the 2014 Russian intervention in Ukraine was actually a wake-up call to rethink the security policy. However, the road to transformation was characterized by a series of disagreements between the key state institutions. The upcoming Parliamentary elections in 2018 will be yet another factor of uncertainty for Moldova and its partners as neither the governing coalition, nor the opposition parties presented a coherent security vision so far.



Photo by army.md.

Understanding Moldovan security sector

Understanding the Moldovan security sector is impossible without first recognizing the primary motivation behind the policy and decision making. As in the majority of countries with a hybrid political regime¹,

¹ The hybrid regimes is a type of the transition government that combines the democratic traits (e. g. direct elections) with the non-democratic traits (e. g. political repression).

the act of governance is largely subordinated to the private interest. Several political actors compete for the state resources. The defence sector was a low priority in the political competition as it provided little political, economic and reputational incentives. In Moldova there is no consolidated military establishment capable of pushing its own agenda, therefore the Ministry of Defence was a marginalised institution from the political perspective. Additionally, Moldova does not have a defence industry capable of generating the economic incentive to invest in the Armed

Forces. The little of what remained from the industrial complex during the Soviet Union, was located in the Transnistria region which the Moldovan authorities lost control of after the 1992 conflict.

As a result, the Moldovan political establishment was largely disengaged from the defence sector. It was satisfied with a passive security policy based on the principles of neutrality because it required little effort to maintain, despite providing no security benefits whatsoever in its current form. Consequently, the Moldova [defence sector was heavily under-resourced, the defence budget varied between 0.3-0.4% of the GDP](#), by far the lowest in the Eastern Partnership countries. It is especially bothersome if taking into consideration the Transnistria “frozen conflict” which remains one of the main security challenges for Moldova. The wake-up call came in 2014 when the Russian Federation intervened in Ukraine by deploying a new type of the hybrid capabilities.

Moldova security policy post-Maidan

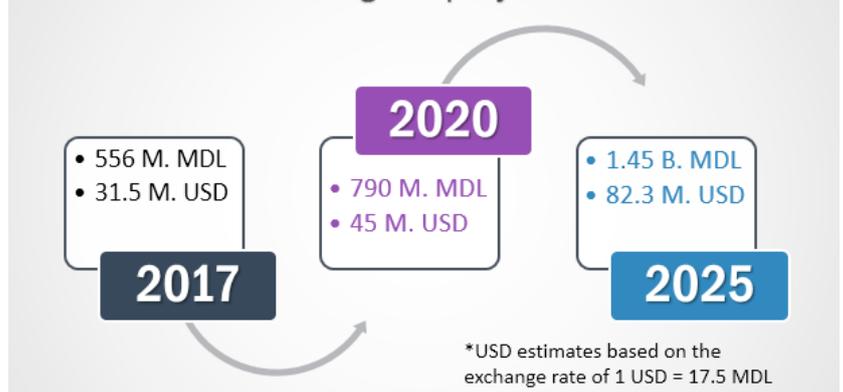
The 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict profoundly [affected the Moldovan national security](#) changing the threat perception among the policy and decisions-makers. It highlighted three core changes: (1) the threat of a direct foreign intervention came back as a major security concern; (2) the intervention is hybrid in nature and countries proved to be unprepared to counter it; (3) the Eastern Partnership countries have deeply-rooted security vulnerabilities that enabled these types of foreign interferences.

With these three assumptions in mind, the Moldovan authorities needed to rethink its security policy and accelerate the defence sector reform. As a result, in 2014 along with Georgia and Ukraine, Moldova negotiated a new [NATO assistance package](#) – Defence Capacity Building Initiative ([DCBI](#))². The DCBI was split into two phases: in the first one it required an update of such strategic documents as the National Security Strategy, the National Defence Strategy and the Military Strategy, and in the second one, the NATO would provide its assistance in transforming the Moldovan armed forces.

The actual implementation of the DCBI package was hampered by the domestic political crisis (2015-2016). As a result, the strategic documents were not adopted, the security sector reform halted and no significant actions were taken to strengthen the country resilience. Furthermore, as the echo of the Ukrainian conflict subsided and further escalation contained, the

² Ukraine received the NATO Comprehensive Assistance Package which included a much broader NATO support.

Moldova Defence Budget – projection for 2017-2025



Moldovan political establishment reverted back to a passive security policy. The election of a pro-Russian opposition President Igor Dodon in November, 2016 gave an excellent pretext to shift the attention to the internal power struggles.

President Vs. Government. Implications for the security sector

It is worth noting that despite the apparent incompatible political attitudes between Igor Dodon and the Governing coalition, these actors do not have a fundamental disagreement in term of the security policy, both largely adhering to the principle of the state neutrality. The divergence stems primarily from the political positioning and foreign policy preferences: on the one hand, a pro-Russian President, on the other hand, a pro-European Government backed by a Parliamentary majority. The situation is complicated by the fact that in the framework of the Moldovan institutional setup, the President is an influential security actor. When his agenda collide with that of the Government it creates major disruption for the security sector. This is exactly what happened in Moldova throughout the 2017. Initially the institutional divergence were held at the level of rhetoric, but escalated gradually to generate an [institutional deadlock](#) in autumn of this year.

The defence sector was a low priority in the political competition as it provided little political, economic and reputational incentives

The first considerable disruption for the security sector was the [dismissal of the Defence Minister](#) appointed by the governing coalition – a move tacitly approved by all stakeholders. The ministry lacked a key leadership figure for more than ten months which considerably weakened the institution and rendered it incapable of the efficiently promoting the reform agenda.

The second disruption was the [withdrawal of the National Security Strategy](#), prepared by the previous

President administration. It was a key policy document developed in the framework of the Defence Capacity Building Initiative, and its withdrawal slowed down the development of other strategic documents. The Government paid very little attention to this matter, largely because the political establishment was preoccupied with other issues.

The third disruption concerns the President refusal to approve the Moldovan troops [participation in the international military exercises](#). It became a considerable irritant in the bilateral relationship with two of the Moldova leading defence partners – USA and Romania – who urged the Government to intervene, resulting in the first public conflict between the institutions. The Government overthrew the President interdiction and [approved](#) the troops participation in the military exercise. Furthermore, the President lost the legislative battle in the Constitutional Court which effectively undermined his authority.

The fourth disruption, with the most public resonance, involves the appointment of the Minister of Defence. The President blocked twice the Government nominee, even after a repeated vote in [the Parliament](#)³, triggering an institutional deadlock. The Government overcame it by appealing to the Constitutional Court which came up with an innovative solution [to the problem](#)⁴. The Court [decided](#) to temporarily suspend the President and designate an incumbent (in this case the President of the Parliament) for the single task of appointing the new Minister.

This measure is a part of a larger effort by the governing coalition to undermine the President as a security stakeholder. Just before Igor Dodon taking office, the President was stripped of the control over two key institutions: the State Protection and Guard Office placed under the Government control, and the Information and Security Services (the national intelligence agency) placed under the Parliament control.

Consistently losing its authority over the security sector, the President adopted a more confrontation tone towards the Government and the defence institutions. In his recent [interview](#) to the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (The Independent Newspaper), he stated that Moldova as a neutral country does not require a national Army. It was an uncharacteristic claim for Igor Dodon, especially taking into consideration that the Armed Forces are the second [most trusted institution](#) in Moldova after the Church. In terms of its policy impact, the President rhetoric is indicative of the frustration over the recently lost political battles rather than an outline of the actual security policy he would pursue in the future.

3 Moldova is a Parliamentary Republic, therefore the President veto can be overridden by the repeated vote in the Parliament.

4 The standard procedure to follow when the President deliberately blocks the legislative process is an impeachment that required 2/3 of the MPs votes.

Future prospects on Moldova security policy

The confrontational tone between the President and the Government reflected negatively on the security sector, nonetheless, there are some developments to look forward too. Soon after the Minister of Defence took its office, the Government [approved](#) the National Defence Strategy (NDS) designed to set up the policy framework for a new cycle of the defence planning. The strategy focused on the hard and hybrid security issues such a presence of the Transnistria paramilitary forces backed up by the Russian troops, information and cyber threats, protection of the critical infrastructure, fight against terrorism and control of illegal migration. In terms of the regional security, the strategy aims to deepen the partnership with the EU and NATO, and seeks out to expand the security cooperation with Romania, Ukraine, and United States. It also addressed the critical issue of the inadequate funding for the defence sector. The NDS initially envisaged a two-stage rise of the [defence spending](#) to 0.5% of GDP until 2020, and a gradual increase to an the European average of 1.4% of GDP after that. After the consultation with the Ministry of Finance, the final formula was agreed. The current defence budget of \$31.6 mln (0.4% of GDP) should increase to \$44.9 mln by 2020 and to \$82.4 mln by 2025 (0.52% of GDP adjusted for the project GDP growth). Contrary to the President Dodon statement, Moldova does require a better equipped and more prepared Army to deal with the new challenges that the country faces today.

Both the President and the Governing coalition both largely adhere to the principle of the state neutrality

When it comes to the actual implementation, Moldova has a habit of writing good strategies on paper with a poor further implementation. [The soon-to-open](#) NATO Liaison Office (NLO) in Chisinau may provide just the necessary amount of the encouragement. The Office goal is to deepen the political dialogue and provide tailored assistance in reforming the defence sector. Even though it is a step forward in the Moldova–NATO partnership, further cooperation will be built with much caution, taking into consideration a generally negative public attitude towards the Alliance and the possible change of the political landscape after the 2018 Parliamentary elections with the possibility of Igor Dodon and the Socialist Party forming the new government.

Speaking about the President, after withdrawing the previous draft of the National Security Strategy in June, 2017 the Supreme Security Council, a consultative body for the Moldovan President, embarked on developing a new one by the end of [2018](#). It is difficult

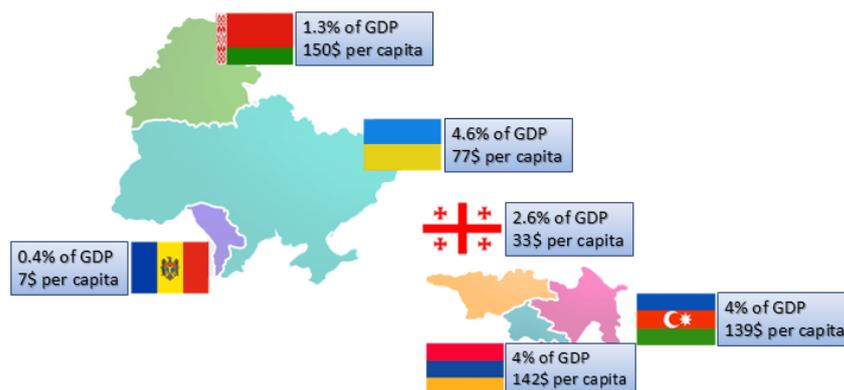
to ascertain its content as Igor Dodon did not present a detailed outlook of his security vision, being primarily engaged in the anti-Western rhetoric. From what can be gathered from the public speeches, he firmly stands by the principle of the permanent neutrality and is set to keep Moldova out of any military alliances. However, it is uncertain whenever he intends to actually scale back the cooperation with NATO and other Western partners, as their support is essential in maintaining at least a minimal level troops preparedness by participation in the military exercises and the international peace keeping operations. Furthermore, the Euro-Atlantic community is the main development partner whose support Moldova cannot afford to lose regardless of the party or a leader in power. Another key partner for Moldova is Romania which the President has a special relation to. On numerous occasions, he singled out the Unionist movement⁵ as one of the core national threat, but whenever his view will materialize in an actual policy still remains to be seen. Any attempts to ban it at the official level will most likely strengthen the movement and considerably damage the relations with Romania.

In contrast, Igor Dodon partnership portfolio with Russia does not mention any defence cooperation, and it is safe to assume that no such initiative will emerge in the near future.

At the same time, Russia is a key stakeholder in the Transnistria conflict settlement as it holds a strong influence over the region in the political, economic and security terms. The Moscow's ideal expectation of Transnistria is to reintegrate it in Moldova on the principle of federation with a far reaching autonomy in order to obtain a direct leverage over the Moldovan policy-making, creating in the process an international precedent to solve the other similar conflicts in the post-Soviet space. The necessary premises to achieve this goal may come during the next Parliamentary elections in 2018. However, the chances that the President and his Socialist Party will immediately deliver on this promise is rather slim because they will

⁵ Unionism movement is a political movement in Moldova whose goal is a unification with Romania.

Defence Expenditure Eastern Partnership Countries



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database 2016

have first to compete over the control of the state institutions, secondly to overcome a public pushback from the pro-European electorate⁶, and thirdly deal with the pressure from the international partners. Under these circumstances, the most-likely course of actions is the preservation of the current status quo which suits all the stakeholders. It also includes little chances of withdrawing the Russian troops from the territory of Transnistria, especially with the half-hearted efforts by the Moldovan Government so far.

Igor Dodon partnership portfolio with Russia does not mention any defence cooperation, and it is safe to assume that no such initiative will emerge in the near future

What is required at a regional level is to improve the solidarity among the Eastern Partnership countries, in particular those with the pro-European aspirations. In the case of Moldova, the radical change of the Ukrainian approach to the Transnistria conflict shifted the momentum of the settlement process in its favour. The same results can be reproduced by the other EaP countries, if the policy makers develop joint projects to improve the resilience, and support each other during the crisis.

⁶ In 2003 the Communist Party, who was at the peak of its power, yielded to the combined international pressure and public protests over the signing of the Kozak Memorandum – a Russian proposal aimed at a final settlement of the relations between Moldova and Transnistria on the principles of an asymmetric federal state.

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www.prismua.org

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www.csfps.by



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www.ei-lat.ge



Foreign Policy Association (Moldova) is Moldova's leading foreign policy think-tank, committed to supporting Moldova's Europeanization, integration into the European Union and a viable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.

www.ape.md