

ELECTIONS 2019 IN MOLDOVA: NEW CHALLENGES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION WITHIN UKRAINE-MOLDOVA-ROMANIA TRIANGLE

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POLICY PAPER



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Moldova: the test for the democratic and european choice

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Moldova is an important part of the intricate regional situation in the Black Sea region. Redefining Russia's role by the states of the region, created the prerequisites for bringing together the positions of Ukraine and Moldova on a whole range of issues, also it led to the resetting of Ukrainian-Romanian relations. Regional transformation was the basis that united the tripartite platform of cooperation - Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Romania. The parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova, which will take place in 2019, will largely determine new challenges and opportunities for this format of cooperation. The strengthening of Russian influence in Moldova does not please either Ukraine or Romania, which has its own interests in this zone. Moreover, the fate of the Transnistrian conflict largely depends on the results of the elections. Approaches that will be applied to the resolution in the Transnistrian conflict can later be used as scenarios for resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict with regard to the Eastern regions of Ukraine. Romania's contribution to the promotion of the democracy in Ukraine and Moldova is extremely important in this context. Dynamic development of relations within the trilateral format and shift away from the policy of small steps are critical at this stage of European integration.

The geopolitical subtext of the elections is typical for election campaigns held in the Republic of Moldova. This is due to a whole complex of factors, among which the historical one is defining. In the run-up to the Parliamentary elections of 2019, this subtext remains and will be accompanied by very tough geopolitical statements, manipulations that inevitably confront pro-European and pro-Russian interests. Electoral technologies and tactics, administrative resources will again be widely used to lobby the interests of certain candidates in this struggle.

EU-Moldova dialogue and post-electoral scenarios of european path

The toughness of political competition is increasing ahead of 2019 legislative elections that are going to renew, to some extent or completely, the existing political landscape. In condition of public funds under pressure after the banking fraud¹, segmented media space², more than half of which controlled by the ruling party, and migration-driven shrinking available pool of voters, the interaction with EU and other external partners becomes vital for political players. Since the Association Agreement entered into force in July 2016, all high rated political parties seek to approach the EU, in positive, negative or mixed ways, aiming at maximizing its political goals at home rather than purely for advancing the relationship with EU as a whole. Simultaneously, the pro-reform civil society organizations play the role of alternative reality-checker therefore helping to correct and balance EU's perception about country progress. The contacts between the EU and the various local actors can be examined through three dimensions: 1) ultimate interest; 2) degree of legitimacy; and, 3) the sense of commonness. These criteria exemplifies the heterogeneity of the Moldovan state and non-state actors, and how actually they are shaping the internal public discourse, the plurality of attitudes in Brussels, and the politics of European integration in Moldova as a whole. The future of dialogue with EU depends on the variety of post-electoral political alliances, which can develop along three basic scenarios. Equally possible are the scenarios where Russian-leaning Socialists take over the power or a coalition between current ruling party and the Socialists is brokered. The third one and least possible is the unification of all pro-EU forces entered in the newly elected legislative.

1. "Ultimate interest"

The ruling party (Democratic Party). Since it fully undertook the reins of powers in late 2015³ after toppling ex-prime minister Vlad Filat, and concentrated the institutional power along 2016⁴, worsening considerably the phenomenon of "state capture"⁵, the governing Democratic Party changed few times the tactics in its approach to the EU. *In the early stage* of its governing (January – December 2016), the Democrats focused on rebuilding the credibility and produce strategic reforms, primarily in banking and financial sectors, in order to restore the European budgetary support. *Later*, in the first half of 2017, the goal of political survival surpassed the preoccupation of preserving the minimum degree of trust from EU and following an authentic policy-oriented rational. Thus, the change of the electoral system⁶ in July 2017 became more important than avoiding criticism of the EU, discontented with the newly introduced electoral system that risks to encourage corrupt electoral practices⁷, and benefit the businesspeople⁸. In order to buy support and diminish the criticism concerning the reshaping of electoral system, the Democratic Party accelerated the antagonistic issues accumulated with Russia along previous years. Before 2018 elections, the ruling party decided to discard the remaining degree of EU's credibility amid the inval-

³ Expert-Grup, State of Country Report 2016, Chapter on Domestic and Foreign Policy, https://www.expert-grup.org/media/k2/attachments/State_of_the_Country_Report.pdf

⁴ From the beginning of 2016 and until 2017, the Democratic Party has managed to increase the number of its MPs, elected at the 2014 legislative elections, from 19 to 47. It also benefits from 6 non-affiliated MPs, 9 MPs belonging to the Group of Moldovan People Party, and occasionally it has the support of 24 MPs of the Socialist Party (ex. the voting on the new electoral system).

⁵ Denis Cenuşa, Moldova, Between Protests and "State Capture", CIDOB, March 2016, Accessed on 4 July: [https://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/opinion/europa/moldova_between_protests_and_state_capture/\(language\)/esl-ES](https://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/opinion/europa/moldova_between_protests_and_state_capture/(language)/esl-ES)

⁶ According to the mixed voting system, which replaced the proportional system, 51 members out of 101 elected will be on the basis of uninominal constituencies.

⁷ Expert-Grup, State of Country Report 2017, Chapter on Domestic and Foreign Policy, https://www.expert-grup.org/media/k2/attachments/RST_2017_en.pdf

⁸ Conclusions of the Council of EU, 26 February 2018, Accessed on 1 July: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6280-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

¹ Expert-Grup, In the aftermath of the banking fraud, 6 April 2016, Accessed on 4 July 2018: <https://www.expert-grup.org/en/biblioteca/item/1263-mega-aprilie-2016>

² Трёхминая Молдова: Кто формирует общественное мнение в стране, 2018, <http://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/trehmirnaya-moldova-kto-formiruet-obshchestvennoe-mnenie-v-strane-37917>

invalidation of mayoral elections in Chisinau by court's decision, qualified as arbitrary, non-transparent and favorable to the Democratic Party⁹. The invalidation of the elections raised serious questions about the strategic thinking of the party, and its capacity to survive the harshening of EU-Moldova political relations (ex. suspension of the assistance) and preserve its self-attributed "pro-EU party" brand during 2019 legislative elections.

Presidency office. During the first 18 months of his presidency, Igor Dodon - informal leader of the pro-Russian Party of Socialists has been openly zig-zagging towards EU, visibly tempting to combine pro-Russian sympathies with pro-EU pragmatism. Considered as a hardline critic of EU, Igor Dodon started gradually to separate his rhetoric into negative and pragmatic opinions. Therefore, on the one hand, he charges the EU with the responsibility for the rising of the LGBT community's rights, declining trade with Russia, and post-2009 failures of the so-called pro-EU governments. On the other hand, Dodon positively referred to a visa-free regime and the economic DCFTA's potential for attracting new investments in Moldova. President's confusing statements regarding EU stretches his party's electoral focus beyond pro-Putin category, and soften the opposition against the possible victory of Socialists in 2018 elections.

Extra-parliamentary opposition. Lacking political power, and being deprived of it (as showed the "invalidation of the mayoral elections in Chisinau"¹⁰), the extra-parliamentary opposition, run by Maia Sandu - Andrei Nastase tandem, attempts to strengthen its voice through intensive communication with EU institutions. A big contribution to that represents its affiliation to European People Party, the most powerful political group in the European Parliament. Using

EPP's political platform, the opposition explores the informal nexus with EU institutions and non-state actors. Thus, it can draw attention on major drawbacks, ranging from corruption schemes to democratic deficiencies, attributed to the ruling party. However, the attempt of the opposition to put Moldova on the political map of EU, and ring the alarm on serious democratic drawbacks, is compared by ruling party with a form to "export internal political battles"¹¹ to Brussels.

Civil society. Due to political independence, large policy expertise and effective monitoring tools, civil society developed a vibrant and sophisticated sender-receiver relationship with EU institutions, in particular with the European Parliament. The internal monopolization of power by the Vladimir Plahotniuc's political party stimulated a growing interactivity between the Moldovan non-governmental sector and Brussels' political ecosystem. At the same time, while the government faced difficulties in persuading European partners about the performance of the European agenda, the civil society managed to tighten its linkages with EU. This explains why EU trusts more the assessments prepared by civil society¹² than those provided by the government. An illustration of such a predisposition of the European institutions constitutes the suspension of the first tranche of the macro-financial assistance. Though it was agreed in November and scheduled for December 2017, due to detailed reporting from civil society, European officials demanded more concrete results (in particular, National Authority of Integrity, anti-money laundry legislation) and therefore temporized the first installment. Lastly, the invalidation of the mayoral elections in Chisinau entailed the decision of suspension of the assistance until political pre-conditions are not fulfilled.¹³

⁹ Civic Coalition for Free and Correct Elections, Statement on the Eroding Democracy in Republic of Moldova, 25 June 2018, Accessed on 1 July 2018: <http://alegeliber.md/en/declaratie-cu-privire-la-erodarea-democratiei-in-republica-moldova-2546.html>

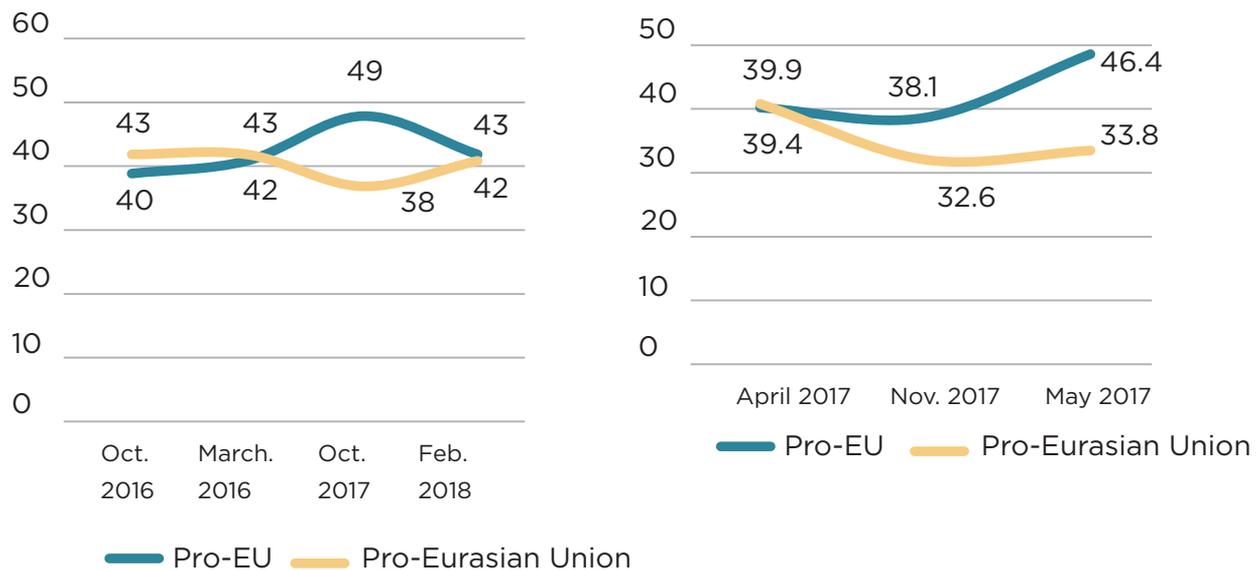
¹⁰ Denis Cenusă, Invalidation of elections in Chisinau, government scenarios and EU reaction, IPN News Agency, 25 June 2018, Accessed on 1 July 2018: <http://ipn.md/en/special/91962>

¹¹ Statement of the spokesperson of the Democratic Party, Vitalie Gamurari, published on Facebook on 5 July 2018 as a reaction to the Resolution of the European Parliament on the political crisis in Moldova following the invalidation of the mayoral elections in Chisinau, adopted with 343 votes in favor, on 5 July 2018

¹² Denis Cenusă, European agenda, civil society and confrontation with the government, IPN News Agency, 22 May 2017, Accessed on 1 July 2018, <http://ipn.md/en/integrare-europeana/83979>

¹³ Remarks of the Vice-President of the Commission Federica Mogherini in the European Parliament amid the debates on the draft resolution on political crisis in Moldova, made on 5 July 2018, <https://eeas.europa.eu/>

Figure. Public perception of Moldovan citizens on the geopolitical orientation of the country 2016-2018, %



Source: IRI.org

Source: Barometer of Public Opinion

2. "Degree of Legitimacy"

On the one hand, EU perceives the legitimacy of the local actors through the lenses of the public polls. They show that the citizens' support for the governing party is below 10%, while the extra-parliamentary opposition parties together overcome 15%.¹⁴ On the other hand, the legitimacy can be measured by looking at the public support for the European vector. Regardless of the full control of legislative and executive power, massive media coverage and access to public resources, the government failed to lift up considerably the pro-EU sympathies among citizens.

The independent polls¹⁵ indicate that pro-EU public is volatile and comparable as weight with pro-Eurasian Union one. Though the latter, in-

tensively promoted by the president Igor Dodon¹⁶, has not offered any tangible benefits to Moldova comparing to EU (technical, financial assistance), it remains very competitive in shaping public preferences. Both the extra-parliamentary opposition and the civil society, which back Association Agreements-driven policies, are unable to offset the damage to the EU image in Moldova, caused by the failures of the government. The lack of perceivable and long-standing successes in European integration policies is the major handicap that the ruling party managed to change only slightly. This is a feasible explanation about why pro-EU sentiments grow slowly, are unstable and can become easily outcompeted by the followers of the Eurasian Economic Union. (See Figure below).

headquarters/headquarters-homepage/47997/remarks-hrvp-mogherini-breaches-human-rights-democracy-and-rule-law-moldova_en

¹⁴ Barometer of Public Opinion, April-May 2018

¹⁵ Barometer of Public Opinion for 2016-2018 and IRI's polls for 2017-2018

¹⁶ Denis Cenusa, Status of the observer at Eurasian Union and impact on Moldova's European agenda, IPN News Agency, 22 May 2018, Accessed on 1 July 2018: <http://www.ipn.md/en/integrare-europeana/91249>

Based on provisions of the Association Agreement, EU relies on civil society organizations that are seen as a crucial actor in supporting the reform agenda. This gives the non-governmental sector a natural advantage in benefiting from EU's credibility, compared to political parties, in particular to the ruling party.

3. "Sense of Commonness"

The sense of belonging to Europe normally takes place through associating with or ignoring the EU values system or by positioning on the side of EU in the geopolitical field. It adds other layers for understanding the local leaning towards EU or, contrary, its rejection.

The governing party has used *two ways* to portray a sort of "commonness" with Europe. *In the first place*, it focused on intensification of the contacts with European institutions, at the state and party levels¹⁷. Thus, it attempted to reaffirm its geopolitical loyalty, but also to monopolize the pro-EU niche in political terms, and enter a larger pool of public sympathizing Europe. This is clearly demonstrated by the initiative of cementing the European integration, as the only external orientation of Moldova,¹⁸ in the Constitution. Such a determination of the ruling confirms its interest to perpetuate its power after the 2018 elections. *Secondly*, the government adopted a geopolitical behavior that is common for Europe; in particular, it refers to the attitude towards Russia. Partially, this appeals to EU member states that condemn Russia's military implication in the war in Donbass, and interference with democratic institutions (elections) and spread of "fake news". The dialogue between Moldova and Russia needed a calibration because it became politicized and unsustainable (ex. embargoes¹⁹). But it looked artifi-

cially antagonized since 2017, after many efforts to reset the economic and political dialogue with Moscow initiated in 2016.²⁰ Moreover, the government successfully has arranged common positions with Georgia and Ukraine to emphasize and amplify the persuasion on Brussels about the real risks caused by Russian factor.²¹

In case of extra-parliamentary opposition, the alignment with the European system of values usually takes place through weaponizing of conditionality principle, inserted in the macro-financial assistance agreement.²² Rule of law and its dependent variables (freedom of judiciary etc.) represent the frontline of opposition's political confrontation with the ruling system. These aspects overlap with EU's struggle to preserve rule of law inside European borders. There are freedom-related areas (media, civil society, LGBT community²³ etc.) that are less prominent, which reduces the "sense of commonness" with EU.

Additionally, to the role attributed by EU in enforcing the reforms as underpinned by Association Agreement, civil society organizations have naturally been closest to the essence of European values. It helped to build more trustworthy bonds with EU that continued to deepen every time when government undermined its dedication to European values. In such conditions, Brussels sees the reflection of its goals mostly in civil society, which can get a larger use

Trade Policy Measures towards Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, September 2017, Accessed on 4 July, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/russia%E2%80%99s-punitive-trade-policy-measures-towards-ukraine-moldova-and-georgia>

²⁰ Denis Cenusă, Association Agreement with EU and maintaining of Moldova in CIS, 5 December 2016, Accessed on 4 July 2018: <http://ipn.md/en/integrare-europeana/80724>

²¹ The joint Statement by the Parliaments of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to the European Parliament with the initiative of Irakli Kobakhidze, 6 July 2017, <http://www.parliament.ge/en/parlamentarebi/chairman/chairman-news/irakli-kobaxidzis-iniciativit-saqartvelos-parlamentma-moldovis-republikis-parlamentma-da-ukrainis-verxovna-radam-evroparlaments-ertoblivi-gancxadebit-mimartes.page>

²² Memorandum of understanding between EU and Moldova, 25 November 2017, Accessed on 1 July: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/economy-finance/20171123_-_mou_eu_-_moldova_-_signed_eu_version.pdf

²³ Denis Cenusă, Intolerance of church in Moldova for anti-discrimination stipulated in Agreement with EU, 14 May 2018, Accessed on 1 July 2018: <https://www.ipn.md/en/special/91067>

¹⁷ Kamil Calus, Moldova's political theatre. The balance of forces in an election year, OSW, January 2018, Accessed on 4 July, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2018-01-31/moldovas-political-theatre-balance-forces-election-year>

¹⁸ Denis Cenusă, Nature of growth of pro-European perception and attempt to "constitutionalize" European course, IPN News Agency, 18 December 2017, Accessed on 4 July, <http://www.ipn.md/en/integrare-europeana/88288>

¹⁹ Cenusă D., Emerson M., Kovziridze T., Movchan V., Russia's Punitive

within society only when key-political parties operate with them in full-fledged fashion.

Three post-electoral scenarios for European integration in Moldova. The behavior, discourse and policies of the future government will inevitably change the dynamic of the European integration after 2018. The composition of the governing power is going to produce slim or, on contrary, radical geopolitical shifts if a specific balance of power emerges as a result of the elections. Based on the current popularity of the political parties, three political scenarios are feasible, consequently influencing the European path.

"Multi-vector coalition". In order to stay in power, and without any chance to build a coalition with the pro-EU opposition, the Democratic Party could accept to build a 'multi-vector coalition' with pro-Russian Socialist Party. Consequently, the dialogue with EU will be restrained to rather policy-relevant than policy-oriented approach. Concomitantly, a bigger attention and efforts will be dedicated to large-scale improving the political relations with Russia. Inevitably, this will require an official and mutually agreed division of the foreign policy between the Democrats and Socialists, which existed between 2016-2018, but were uncoordinated and inconsistent.

"Pro-EU refurbished coalition". The possibility to create a pro-EU coalition after the elections dramatically shrank after the introduction of mixed voting in 2017 and invalidation of mayoral elections in June 2018. The idea of such a coalition was promoted by the Democratic Party but always rejected by the extra-parliamentary opposition. Though is the least probable scenario it was not officially abandoned by the ruling party, regardless of its confrontational approach against EU institutions and the opposition amid EU's decision to delay the payment of the macro-financial assistance.

"Pro-Russia-Eurasian Union majority". A pessimistic scenario for ambitious relations with EU will occur if the Socialist Party manages to register a victory, which enables them to govern independently from other political parties. This may impact the depth of the dialogue with EU. However, the Socialists will be cautious in reviewing radically the agreements with EU, avoiding public eventual discontent and disruptions in sensitive policies, such as trade or visa-free regime.

Path the potential of Russian influence in electoral context (the impact of «ruskiy mir»)

Political Tensions on the Eve of Parliamentary Elections

The contradiction of geopolitical interests makes the internal political situation in the Republic of Moldova extremely difficult and excludes the possibility of forming a broad anti-oligarchic front. In the conditions of democratic development, this seems to be decisive for the state's reaching a new level of development. The use of power levers solely for the realization of one's own political interests is especially tangible in small states, to which the Republic of Moldova belongs. It is not yet possible to concentrate on improving the welfare of its citizens, ensuring the sustainable development and successful completion of the reforms initiated by the power structures. The whole process is affected by the low level of democracy, corruption of the highest spheres of the government and low level of political culture. The current vertical of power in the Republic of Moldova does not focus efforts on the cohesion of the population, but on the contrary contributes to its disunity, which aggravates the difficulties of the internal political development of the country and hinders the internal modernization processes.

This time, the parliamentary elections will be held in a mixed electoral system (50 deputies on party lists and 51 in single-mandate constituencies). The political moods and dominants prevailing in the Moldovan society are quite clearly reflected in the statistics. Thus, according to the results of the spring 2018 poll conducted by the "Public Opinion Barometer", if there were parliamentary elections the next Sunday, three parties would be guaranteed to be in the Parliament. 26% of the respondents would vote for the Party of Socialists, 12% - for "Action and Solidarity", 7% - for Democratic Party. 5% of the total number of respondents are ready to give votes for the party "Platform Dignity and Truth". It should be noted that this party intends to take part in the parliamentary elections in the bloc with "Action and Solidarity". 4% or less are ready to vote for the rest of the political formations.

At the same time, 17% of respondents noted that they did not decide on a vote, the same number chose to

refuse to answer questions, or they said they would not participate in the elections. If to take into account the respondents who managed to make their choice, then the three parties have a chance to overcome the six percent threshold. In this case, the Party of Socialists is gaining 40%. That is, it is demonstrating rather high confidence ratings among citizens, "Action and Solidarity" - 19%, the Democratic Party - 11%, "Platform Dignity and Truth" - 7%, "Shor" party - 6%, Party of Communists - 6%.²⁴ Other political parties, according to the poll, will not be able to pass the threshold. The study demonstrated for the first time that the "Shor" party has real chances to get into Parliament. This seems particularly interesting in view of the involvement of I. Shore in the sensational "stealing a billion". Attention should be drawn to the suspicions about the illegal support of the election campaign of the candidate from the "Shor" Party Regina Apostolov. She is supposed to have got financing from the Russian Federation within local elections. Thus, political parties that conditionally can be called agents of Russian influence are fairly confident and active.

The upcoming elections should not be viewed as fateful. Rather, they are extremely complex and do not give a clear prospect of forming coordinated work of power structures. It should not be excluded that the current political crisis, which is not advertised by the authorities, will lead to a scenario of early elections. The current President needs the support of the Parliament. A pro-presidential party with a parliamentary majority is his key goal, which will not be easy to achieve.

According to the latest data of the reputable organization Freedom House, the Republic of Moldova is considered to be among the states of a hybrid regime.²⁵ The formal nature of democracy does not allow the political system of Moldova to become a genuinely coherent mechanism in which groups restrain and balance each other in the process of realizing

²⁴ Barometer of Public Opinion. Republic of Moldova. - Chisinau: CIVIS April-May 2018. - p.62.

²⁵ Freedom in the World 2017. Moldova // <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/moldova>

their interests in order to find a mutually acceptable solution. On the contrary, the disunity of political elite action, the promotion of their own political interests, the presence of systemic flaws in electoral processes, in particular, the use of «dirty technology» and «black PR» deprive them of the opportunity to come to the organization of an effective political system. Whereas, the mutually acceptable solutions based on dialogue, openness, tolerance, critical research and compromise are the key components characterizing a democratic state.

Economic and energy factors continue to influence the persisting dependence of the Republic of Moldova on the Russian Federation. The tension will remain unchanged regardless of the geopolitical coloring of the authorities and the election results. Reduction of the Russian factor influence is possible through the implementation of the planned reforms, economic development of the country, more active and large-scale practical involvement in the processes of European integration. The pro-European parties need to concentrate their efforts on raising their ratings and fruitful work towards state modernization.

In addition, on 14 May 2018, at a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, it was decided to grant Moldova the status of country observer within the Eurasian Economic Union. Despite the statements of the pro-European authorities in the Republic of Moldova that this will not have legal force, I. Dodon intends to use this status as effectively as possible to bring the mutual cooperation with the EAEU countries in different spheres of the economy to a qualitatively new level.²⁶

Participation of the President of Moldova on the margins of the 22nd International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg, discussions with representatives of the all-Russian public organization "Delovaya Rossiya" and other representatives of big business, inviting them to participate in the Economic Forum, which will

be held in Moldova in September - all this is perceived by the citizens as the President's commitment on the course towards rapprochement with Russia. This finds wide support mainly among national minorities.

Features of Russian Influence

The Russian world ("*Ruskiymir*") in the Republic of Moldova continues to be that community, which unites the cultural and ideological components, as well as the Russian language. The Republic of Moldova as a multicultural country, located on the geopolitical fault line, absorbed the interlacing of various cultural traditions and languages. The struggle for the influence of the Russian and Anglo-Saxon worlds had a direct impact on Moldova. Today, in the world there is a clearer trend towards the replacement of the Russian language and the Russian world, which is due, first of all, to the Russian foreign policy itself. The Republic of Moldova is also directing its efforts to increasingly reducing the range of the Russian language use. On the eve of the parliamentary elections, these actions become more vocal.

Russian ideological and information resources continue to exert their manipulative influence, despite the active measures taken by the country's authorities aimed at combating propaganda and disinformation. Undoubtedly, the Law on Amending the Code on Television and Radio, adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on December 7, 2017 aimed to restrict the transmission and retransmission of information, analytical, political and military broadcasts on the territory of Moldova from states that have not ratified the European Convention on Transfrontier Broadcasting. This law restricts the broadcast of such programs from Russia, which has not ratified this convention. Despite this, as well as the beginning of the development of Romanian language content on local television channels, the support of the Government of the Republic of Moldova to strengthen the country's media sector, the Government's approval of the draft of the National Conception for the Development of the Media in the Republic of

²⁶ Remarks by President I. Dodon at the Meeting of the Eurasian Economic Council // <http://www.presidente.md/rus/discursuri/tezisy-vystupleniya-prezidenta-rm-igorya-dodona-na-zasedanii-vysshego-evraziiskogo-ekonomicheskogo-soveta>

Moldova for 2018-2025,²⁷ the popularity of Russian information resources and portals do not decrease. For example, the news agency Sputnik, founded by the international information agency "Russia Today", which includes websites, mobile applications, online broadcasts, broadcasting service and press centers, received a wide popularity.

According to the results of the "Public Opinion Barometer" 50% of the respondents do not agree with the anti-propaganda law adoption, contented – 25%. 69% of respondents consider that propaganda is a problem of Moldova's media-market and 75% believe that media is used for manipulation of public opinion.²⁸

Considering Russian influence on the electoral process, the decision rendered by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova on 4 June 2018, seems also to have important implications. By this decision, the Constitutional Court met the request of the Liberal Party to abolish certain provisions of the laws regulating the status of the Russian language as a means of interethnic communication and recognized the law "On the Functioning of Languages on the Territory of the Moldavian USSR"²⁹ to be obsolete.

It is worth recalling that other pieces of legislation were adopted on the basis of this law. In 2014, the last amendments were introduced. Now when the law is actually canceled all other legislation is no longer valid.³⁰ It can be assumed with high proba-

bility that the Russian language will lose its status of international communication in the Republic of Moldova. Thus, one can speak of systematic and coordinated actions of the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, aimed not only to fight the Russian propaganda but also to narrow the borders of the Russian world.

In addition, one can also see the context of the internal political struggle in these actions. The President has attempted repeatedly to block decisions taken by Government and Parliament. At the same time, the pro-European majority seeks to curtail already limited power of the President and trying this way to lower the popularity ratings of both the President himself and the Socialist Party. Step-by-step actions aimed at limiting the broadcasting of Russian news and political programs, reduction of the official status of the Russian language, which will significantly reduce its actual role within time and, finally, narrow the Russian world's territory in Moldova. There are expectations that undoubtedly the probability of the victory of pro-European forces will significantly increase without the Russian Federation support, its information and ideological influence.

On the eve of the elections, the activities of Russian funds, political parties, Russian experts, journalists, public figures, which directly influence public opinion, are becoming much more active. At the same time, it should be noted that the efforts of the League of Russian Youth, the Foundation "Russkiy Mir", the Russian Center for Science and Culture, as well as the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs and International Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo), including these in the Transnistrian region and the Gagauz Autonomy will not bring, the so-called surprise effect, since they are traditional.

It should be mentioned that according to the results of the presidential election in 2016, during which I. Dodon, who managed to build his election campaign

²⁷ Executive supports strengthening of national mass media sector // <https://gov.md/en/content/executive-supports-strengthening-national-mass-media-sector>

²⁸ Barometer of Public Opinion. Republic of Moldova. – Chisinau: CIVIS April-May 2018. – p.44-46.

²⁹ The law № 3465 from September 1, 1989 "On the Functioning of Languages on the Territory of the Moldavian USSR" // <http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=312813&lang=1>

³⁰ The Court examined the Constitutionality of Certain Legal Provisions on the Use of the Russian language on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and on the Inapplicability of Constitutional Review of Laws Passed prior to the Entry Into Force of the Constitution // <http://www.constcourt.md/libview.php?l=en&idc=7&id=1213&t=/Media/News/The-Court-Examined-the-Constitutionality-of-Certain-Legal-Provisions-on-the-Use-of-Russian-Language-on-the-Territory-of-the-Republic-of-Moldova-and-on-the-Inapplicability-of-Constitutional-Review-of-Laws-Passed-Prior-to-the-Entry-Into-Force-of-the-Constitution>

on the thesis of rapprochement with Russia, scored in Gagauzia 99% of the vote. However, no specific efforts were made to develop effective instruments and mechanisms regarding ethnic minorities' problems of these territories from the part of the pro-European majority. Therefore, the Gagauz region is unlikely to support the pro-European parties in the Parliamentary elections. They will give their votes in favor of the Socialist Party.

The populist tactics of the pro-Russian president play a huge role in consolidating the mental dependence on the Russian Federation in the Moldovan society. His visits to the Russian Federation and the issues he discussed with President Vladimir Putin, meetings with representatives of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation with a view to improving relations at the inter-parliamentary and intergovernmental level, as well as with politicians, statesmen, business environment representatives are widely covered. All this enhances Russian influence, and also gives additional advantages both to the President himself and additional political points for the Socialist Party, which he headed before being elected a president. The fault lines in the national space are not simply preserved, they are aggravated, clearly separating pro-Russian and pro-European supporters.

In this regard, certain questions are raised: will Moldova take the path of combining European integration processes with the Eurasian dialogue and strategic cooperation with the Russian Federation, or will it adhere to the European civilizational way of development it has chosen? This convincingly proves once again that the difficulties of the democratic development of the Republic of Moldova continue to persist. The so-called "showcase democracy" inherent in domestic political dynamics complicates greatly the European path of the Republic of Moldova. On the eve of the parliamentary elections, under the current political situation marked by the continued influence of the Russian Federation, it would be fair to call the situation relatively stable.

Transnistrian Conflict

The security problems associated with the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict are getting increasingly topical. The expectations regarding the new opportunities for resolving this issue after the elections are ambiguous. New emerging narratives and reaction to them, taking into account the manipulations of the Russian Federation, make us think about the consequences of the results of the parliamentary elections and understand how fundamentally different approaches to the withdrawal of the Operational Group of Russian Forces in Transnistria can be. We should not forget either about the potential and strength of the PMR Ministry of Internal Affairs, military drills, which are increasingly being held by the Operational Group of Russian Forces in the region and Russia's unwillingness to withdraw its troops.

Statements of Ukraine about its readiness to provide a corridor for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of Transnistria as well as this of the ammunition stored in warehouses in Kolbasna are theoretically possible.³¹ However, Ukraine is unlikely to transfer to their practical implementation. Providing the territory and ensuring safe withdrawal of the Operational Group of Russian Forces as well as the "explosive inheritance" presupposes not only Ukraine's readiness to help in this matter but also Russia's readiness to withdraw its troops. Currently such a desire is not observed, on the contrary, the Russian side emphasizes the possible destabilization of the situation, explaining this by the unstable situation in Ukraine itself.

It should be recalled that in the village of Kolbasna, Rybnitsa district, about 20 000 tons of ammunition are stored. The Kolbasna depots of arms, ammunition and other military equipment are guarded by the Russian military.³²It is necessary to understand that

³¹ Ukrainian experts about the «Green corridor» to evict the Russian troops out of Transnistria // <https://deschide.md/en/news/political/2867/Ukrainian--experts-about-the-Green-corridor-to-evict-the-Russian-troops-out-of-Transnistria.htm>

³² Ukrainian Defense Ministry supports Moldova's efforts to withdraw Russian troops // <http://www.infotag.md/populis-en/234280/>

to dispose the ammunition under Kolbasnathere is a need of donors since this procedure is very expensive. The question of the technical state of these munitions is also important, as well as the inclusion of observers who will monitor their movement for safety and avoidance of losses during transportation.

To solve these problems, there must be a holistic understanding of the Transnistrian problem by the Moldovan and Ukrainian sides. It is necessary to work out a doctrinal level of conflict resolution taking into account the entire spectrum of potential and possible threats and to develop synchronism and cohesion of statements and actions.

Considering this issue, it should be noted that the possible scenarios for the development of the events after the elections of 2018 are not very optimistic. In case of the Socialist Party victory, taking into account the statements of the President I. Dodon, one should expect the legitimization of Russian troops presence. The tandem of the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party of Moldova against the platform "Dignity and Truth" will lead to complex internal political relations, accompanied by blocking of decisions and status quo scenario.

The platform "Dignity and truth" itself does not have any precondition to get the majority. It is also unlikely that they will be able to form a coalition with the Democratic Party headed by V. Plahotniuc. It seems almost impossible to form an effective system in this configuration. In such conditions, the Transnistrian conflict will remain frozen, and Russian influence will persist.

The ambiguity of the issue of expanding or decreasing Russian influence is becoming more relevant in the conditions of the upcoming elections. And although today Russia's influence can no longer be called exclusive or dominant, it still remains. Russia's economic leverage and soft power resources continue to be effective. There is a feeling that in Russia there has been strengthened the opinion that the economic dependence of the Republic of Moldova will not allow it to finally reorient itself to the European market. In addition, despite attempts to confront Russia's pressure, questions of the responsibility of the authorities for the development of the state, those of the lack of national unity and cohesion, of political elite's corruption and the low standard of living of the population remain extremely sensitive in the Republic of Moldova. The Russian labor market continues to be in demand both by ordinary citizens of Moldova and by representatives of business structures and business circles. Despite the fact that the Russian soft-power system in the current conditions is losing the West, particularly because of the use of archaic tools, yet it has not lost its effectiveness.

The perspectives of the political process and the prospective foreign policy priorities

Though the Republic of Moldova is 27 years old explaining its latest political and foreign policy evolutions discussed in this chapter would not cover the entire, though short, life-span of the country. To understand its latest foreign policies a brief incursion into 2009 period and its follow up shall suffice. A brief intro about the 90's and their follow up 2009-2018 time-span will attempt to explain the groundwork that led to some of the current security, economic and foreign policy decisions today, and perhaps how the citizens of the Republic of Moldova managed to elect in 2001 the Party of Communists and change it in 2009, with its fluctuating policy towards East and West.³³ The fluctuating foreign policy might be returning and there might be a fall back to a government using previous sultanic practices these days again,³⁴ while remaining dependent on the Western financial and political support, with whom, it claimed, it shares principles and values. The evolution of the domestic and foreign policy of these periods, along with the old actors continuously involved in those policies and their power play, as well as appearance of new political players, allows us to see the projection of the Moldovan foreign policy for the nearest future.

The Fluctuating Moldovan Foreign Policy from the Start

During the end of the democratic 90's Moldovan political parties went for the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union.³⁵ However, the severe economic crisis of 1998 generated a number of economic and foreign policy decisions that led to a number of fluctuations. Ukraine enterprises and Ciuci-

organ power plant cut Moldova from the power supply, turned it towards Romania, which was a convenient "scarecrow" in the pro-Russian political circles. As a result of the economic crisis, the Government also ceded the control of Moldovan gas towards Russia³⁶, along Tiraspol-Trans-Gaz under separatist control.³⁷ One year before that the free export of the Transnistrian goods, in exchange for joint border-customs control, was already allowed by then Moldovan President Lucinschi, under 1997 Primakov Memorandum.³⁸ These and a number of other decisions brought the defeat of the Democrats in 2001 early elections and a supermajority for the Party of Communists, including on a wave of a USSR nostalgia and, hence pro-Russian sentiments.³⁹ The changing relations with neighbors also had an impact on the foreign policy decision process, along with the Transnistrian conflict talks.

For the next 10 years, the Communist Party shifted from promising to enter Russia-Belarus Union to EU aspirations to negotiating closer ties to European Union. It initially advocated to join Russia-Belarus Union and negotiated in 2003 an ultimately rejected Transnistrian conflict "federalization document" known as Kozak Memorandum by the Head of the Russian presidential administration, later re-used in Ukraine.⁴⁰ As soon as the relations with Russia worsened due to the refusal to sign the Kozak Memorandum, the Communist Party had no other choice, except turning for help to the European Union, an evolution that might be a reverse to what we observe

³³ Vlad Lupan "Moldova - ballet between Russia and Romania" op-ed for Revista22 <https://revista22.ro/4693/html>

³⁴ A 2007 interview by IDS-Viitorul Think Tank Director, Igor Munteanu, to the Moldovan news agency IPN on the stronger resemblance of Moldovan political regime to a sultanic one <http://www.ipn.md/ro/politica/6997>

³⁵ Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration on Moldova-EU relations (retrieved on 25 July 2018) <http://www.mfa.gov.md/despre-relatiile-rm-ue/>

³⁶ A Radio Free Europe 2016 overview of the Moldovan media reporting on the 1998 economic collapse and its political and foreign policy impacts <https://www.europalibera.org/a/27902654.html>

³⁷ "Gazprom Empire in Moldova" by anti-corruption investigative group RISE <https://www.rise.md/english/confidential-contract-gazprom-empire-in-moldova/> and the full text of the Governmental Decision to create Moldova-Gaz, an essentially Gazprom subsidiary <https://www.rise.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Hotarire-Guvern-Creare-Moldovagaz.pdf>

³⁸ The full text of the "Memorandum on the Basis for Normalization of Relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transdnestria" <https://www.osce.org/moldova/42309>

³⁹ Radu Vrabie in "The foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova (1998-2008)" Cartdidact, Chisinau 2010, ISBN: ISBN 978-9975-4001-6-9, page 100, [http://www.fes-moldova.org/media/publications/2010/The%20Foreign%20Policy%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Moldova%20\(1998-2008\).pdf](http://www.fes-moldova.org/media/publications/2010/The%20Foreign%20Policy%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Moldova%20(1998-2008).pdf)

⁴⁰ "Why Russia wants the federalization of Ukraine" by Prof. Motyl, Rutgers University, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/alexander-motyl/russia-ukraine-federalization_b_5727256.html

in the Moldovan foreign policy today. By 2008 the Communist Government corruption and anti-democratic tendencies prevailed and it returned to what we called sultanic practices, stemming from USSR authoritarianism.⁴¹ Hence, before 2009 elections Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov was invited to the Republic of Moldova and the communists were siding with Moscow over Kremlin's gas war with Ukraine⁴², and again signing dangerous agreements with the separatists.⁴³ A point to note in this respect – the man who was apparently the financial right hand of the ruling Communist Party of those times, is the leader behind the Moldovan Government of 2018, Mr. Vladimir Plahotniuc.⁴⁴

In April of 2009, after general elections, the Moldovan "Twitter Revolution" happened, against the perception of a stolen vote and Communist party practices.⁴⁵ The deadlock in the Parliament did not allow the election of the President. The Democratic Party lost elections and would not be present in the new Parliament. However, as the youth was tortured after the April 2009 "Twitter Revolution" and political parties stood firm against the Communist pressure to elect a President convenient to them, the situation has changed and two important figures fled the Communists – the Speaker of the Parliament, Marian Lupu and Mr. Plahotniuc, with his wealth. They joined the Democratic Party (DP) that could not enter the parliament in an apparently losing move, however boosting its popularity and finances. The DP was re-elected to the Parliament, after the deadlock in

electing the Moldovan President that year ended in early elections in July 2009.

From pro-Western 2009 to Fluctuation in 2018 again

After years of Communist shifts from accusations of undermining Moldovan statehood, to supporting it, and back to the old accusation in case of Romania, as well as strained relations with neighboring Ukraine, the new Moldovan authorities declared a change in their stance. A group of Moldovan foreign policy experts from inside and outside the country, as witnessed in person, were called to contribute to the new Program of Governance of the freshly elected coalition of political parties that was planned to be called the "Alliance for European Integration" (AIE).

European Union

- As the name of the Alliance suggests the main chapter dealing with both foreign and domestic foreign policy was dedicated to the relations with the EU and fulfillment of the Copenhagen Criteria, including domestic reforms. This topic is covered extensively by other authors of this study. One side-effect that would solicit our attention in terms of pro-Russian parties' views on the relations with neighbors is the opposition of the Moldovan Party of Communists to the Small Border-traffic Treaty, who suggested that a friendly bilateral relations treaty with Romania had to be signed first. While Communists' permanent fluctuations between East and West are unsurprising, this one was reflecting again Russia's permanent fears of Moldova's reunification with Romania, very often found in Russian media.⁴⁶ Presumably, such a matter should have been an exclusive subject of internal Moldovan politics. However, such an intensely unapproved concern on the side of Russia, may be taken as another indication of the

⁴¹ Radio Free Europe Interview with Vlad Lupu "Far from being reformed, the Party of Communists is a sultanic-type party", 25 April 2009 <https://www.europalibera.org/a/1615593.html>

⁴² Vlad Lupu, Feature article for Radio Free Europe "The Ukrainian Gas Crisis Is Over; Moldova Now Feels The Heat" 22 January 2009 https://www.rferl.org/a/The_Ukrainian_Gas_Crisis_Is_Over_Moldova_Now_Feels_The_Impact/1373284.html

⁴³ IPN article "Statement signed in Moscow will have serious repercussions for Transnistria conflict settlement process, independent analyst", 18 March 2009, <http://www.azi.md/en/story/1817>

⁴⁴ Maria Levenco "Vlad Plahotniuc: Moldova's man in the shadows" 25 February 2016 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/maria-levenco/vlad-plahotniuc-moldova-s-man-in-shadows>

⁴⁵ Online reporting on Moldova's protests of 7 April 2009 by Unimedia.md, reposted by Hotnews.Ro (retrieved on 25 July 2018, when Unimedia's page was unavailable) <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-5556467-vid-eo-update-chisinau-ciocniri-intre-cei-30-000-manifestanti-politie-clidirea-parlamentului-flacari-ora-22-00.htm#self>

⁴⁶ A google search in Russian would reflect years of concerned publications about Moldova reuniting with Romania - e.g. Kommersant newspaper "Лишь бы не было страны. Как Молдавия становится Румынией — в специальном репортаже "б", 01.04.2008, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3585366>

Union and a de facto advocate of a pro-European Republic of Moldova both within the EU and outside. This idea was accepted after some debate with the factors within the AIE. Romanian continues to play a major advocacy role in the situation of the Republic of Moldova, as well as its relations with EU, US and the world. Furthermore, it developed a more active donor role as well.⁵³

- Ukraine: The issue of the strategic partnership with Ukraine was also on the agenda. Possibly due to the fears of being linked to Ukraine in the process of European integration and the perceptions of being dragged behind Western Balkans, the AIE never went through with this idea. However, after several expert suggestions to withhold Moldovan physical presence from the ground and observe the demarcation from a short distance, real progress was achieved in the on-the-ground demarcation of the border on the Transnistrian segment of the Moldo-Ukrainian border.⁵⁴ Talks were held over the implementation of a previous agreement regarding the use of a road by Ukraine inside Moldova for transit purposes, as well as Moldovan properties in Ukraine. Ultimately, the Moldovan long-standing and persistent request for a joint border control with Ukraine saw a positive outcome in 2018.⁵⁵

The Shift of 2016-2018

The political evolutions yet of 2011 saw a less known former Minister of Economy of the previous Communist Government, Igor Dodon, along with a seemingly more important figure, the former Prime-minister, Zianida Greceanii, leave the Communist Party. This happened during the internal Moldovan political cri-

sis, when the Parliament was in a deadlock, unable to elect the President of the Republic of Moldova. The former Communists declared that they were ready to support the governing coalition AIE on that, though not on anything else. At the same time, one of the leaders of AIE reacted that they will not vote for Ms. Greceanii as the President, implying a possible existing deal between the former Communists and at least some of AIE components.⁵⁶ Regardless, after a long standoff that resulted in a March 2012 vote for an AIE suggested President, the number of votes cast in the elections, as well as the Communist Party refusal to vote, lead us to the conclusion that Mr. Dodon voted positively for an AIE candidate.⁵⁷ This may indicate that either he patriotically voted to avoid a political crisis, as he declared in 2011, or that the pro-Russian politician arguably already had a political arrangement with an AIE component yet in 2011.

The steady growth of the Socialist Party that Igor Dodon decided to espouse after his defection from the Party of Communists, did not bring the Socialists the highest popularity at the beginning of 2016, the year when unexpected direct Presidential elections were reintroduced in the Republic of Moldova. His party was second after a seemingly pro-Moldova, though with a strong Russian connection, "Our Party" formation in a poll in February 2016.⁵⁸ Yet, during the Presidential elections in autumn of 2016, he was the candidate running the last elimination round against Maia Sandu, the leader of Party for Action and Solidarity (PAS – also translated as "Step").⁵⁹ It is noteworthy that the media affiliated with the Democratic Party used fake news propagated by the Socialist media and taken over by the Russian media, that the pro-Western

⁵³ "Romania, the most important European donor for Moldova" July 21, 2015, <https://bani.md/romania-cel-mai-important-donator-european-pentru-republica-moldova-cati-bani-ne-a-oferit-anul-trecut-pentru-proiecte-de-asistenta/>

⁵⁴ Moldovan Border Police news on the session of the Moldo-Ukrainian Joint Demarcation Commission on 17 November 2016 <http://www.border.gov.md/index.php/ro/3225-noi-discutii-privind-demarcarea-frontierei-de-stat-moldo-ucrainene>

⁵⁵ "Ukraine ratifies the agreement with Moldova on joint border control" Kyiv Post, 12 April 2018 <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/ukraine-ratifies-agreement-moldova-joint-border-control.html>

⁵⁶ "(video) Dodon, Greceanii and Abramciuc leave the PCRM faction and are ready to vote the president of the country" by Unimedia news portal, 4 November 2011 <https://unimedia.info/stiri/video-dodon--greceanii-si-abramciuc-parasesc-fractiunea-pcrm-si-sunt-gata-sa-voteze-presedin-tele-tarii-40799.html>

⁵⁷ "Moldova has a President" Unimedia online portal reporting from the Parliament that 62 votes were cast (which was more than AIE deputies), March 16, 2012, <https://unimedia.info/stiri/video--foto-moldova-are-presedin-te-45526.html>

⁵⁸ "Infographics. Poll: LP dropped to 1.2%. Usatii and Dodon at the top of the charts" Agora online news portal, February 24, 2016, <http://agora.md/stiri/16660/sondaj-pl-a-coborat-la-1-2--usatii-si-dodon-in-fruntea-topurilor>

⁵⁹ Party of Action and Solidarity website <http://unpaspentru.md/>

Maia Sandu promised to Europeans to bring into Moldova 30.000 Syrians.⁶⁰ Similar fakes were later used in Czech elections of 2018.⁶¹ Taking note that Moldovan Socialist and Moldovan Democratic party media propagated similar anti-Sandu fakes, we may consider the previous vote by Mr. Dodon for the Moldovan President in 2012, possibly in conjunction with an AIE component, even more. Taking into account that Igor Dodon was constantly received by President Putin as of 2014, long before he became the Moldovan President⁶², introduces additional context in the foreign policy changes of the Republic of Moldova in 2017-2018. On the specific note of the foreign policy, an additional earlier sign confirming in 2017 a DP-Socialist coalition was the recall or reshuffling of the openly pro-Western ambassadors from the Moldovan diplomatic service, and nomination of two Socialist Party members or affiliates into ambassadorial positions to Moscow and the Commonwealth independent States.⁶³

The above media coverage to promote the Socialist pro-Russian President Dodon by the Democratic Party, their joint vote on the change of the electoral system criticized by the Council of Europe Venice Commission,⁶⁴ which endangered the disbursement of the EU funds to Moldova, their distribution of diplomatic envoys, especially to Moscow, and the last drop, the latest July 2018 invalidation of local elections in the Moldovan capital between pro-Western Platform for Justice and Truth (Platforma DA) and pro-Russian socialists, cancelling the victory of the Platforma DA leader and which leaving the Moldovan

capital in the hands of DP coalition partners (European Popular Party of Moldova – PPEM), instead of freely elected anti-corruption opposition, generated harsh reactions from EU and US⁶⁵, is believed to be done by Democratic Party-affiliated judges, thus confirming the existing undeclared coalition between the Democrats and the pro-Russian Socialists⁶⁶. The latest attempt of the Democrats to swing some of the voters from PAS+DAS via a UN resolution on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova⁶⁷, presumably failed to impress, as it was a non-binding resolution, lacking deadlines for withdrawal and refusing to call for withdrawal of the so-called Russian “peacekeeping” – most importantly it was followed by the above-mentioned invalidation of local elections criticized by the EU and US, which was self-defeating for the Democrats, who then attempted derogatory criticism towards the EU’s resolution to stop funding for the Moldovan Government.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ The anthology of fake news origin, “referencing” and distribution by the Socialist and Democratic Party-affiliated media was published by the anti-corruption Newspaper Ziarul de Garda, on 6 November 2016, <http://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-politice/cum-a-evoluat-minciuna-cu-sirienii-de-la-un-site-de-pamflete-la-cea-mai-urmarita-televiziune-din-tara>

⁶¹ “Fake News Kicks Into High Gear In Czech Presidential Runoff” by RFE/RL, January 21, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/fake-news-kicks-into-high-gear-czech-presidential-vote/28987922.html>

⁶² Встреча главой партии социалистов Молдавии Игорем Додоном бывшим премьер-министром Молдавии Зинаидой Гречаный” on the official website of Russian Presidential Administration, November 5, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/500/events/46935>

⁶³ “Most of the diplomats replaced were those who promoted the pro-European line of the Government” interview with Vlad Lupan by Radio Free Europe, 18 February 2018 <https://www.europalibera.org/a/interviu-vlad-lupan-liliana-barbarosie/29046883.html>

⁶⁴ <https://www.europalibera.org/a/opinie-expertii-comisiei-de-la-venetia-sistemul-electoral/29109692.html>

⁶⁵ US State Department on the Invalidation of Mayoral Elections in Moldova, Press Statement by Heather Nauert, Department Spokesperson, Washington, DC, June 28, 2018 <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/06/283586.htm>

⁶⁶ <http://www.contributors.ro/global-europa/analiza-invalidarea-mandatu-lui-de-primar-al-lui-andrei-nastase-inamicul-no-1-al-lui-plahotniuc-ar-putea-aranca-in-aer-regimul-oligarhic-de-la-chi%C8%99inau/>

⁶⁷ https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/72/282

⁶⁸ “Emotions after the Resolution” Radio Free Europe, by Vitalie Ciobanu, 11 July 2018, <https://www.europalibera.org/>

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Thus, the Parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova in 2019 will become the so-called "test of strength" of the European vector in the context of those management trends that were used by the authorities in their domestic and foreign policies. In these conditions, it is important not to depart from the realistic views and principles in the decision-making process, as well as the strategic thinking chosen by the triad community (Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Romania) and taking into account European aspirations. This will expand the instruments of cooperation, within the strategy of interaction between states which is increasingly getting distinct outlines. The tripartite platform of interaction enables to open new opportunities provided that the consolidation of efforts towards regional solidarity, democratic and sustainable development of states continues. The emerging pragmatism in the development of joint projects between states can play a beneficial role in the successful completion of initiated reforms and the ever-greater integration in the European Union.

Ukraine: political lessons for Moldova

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Ukraine is one of the two neighboring states with the Republic of Moldova. The countries are connected by the common historical past, close cultural and economic links, as well as by common foreign policy goals and challenges. Ukrainians form a wide ethnic group in Moldova and, accordingly, a lot of Moldovans live in Ukraine. However, awareness of Ukraine in Moldova is not very strong now.

Moldova receives the information and news about Ukraine mainly from Russian media sources (according to the study carried out by the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism", the Republic of Moldova is among the regions that are most vulnerable to Russian disinformation)¹. Such information was significantly distorted, it contributed to the formation of a negative image of Ukraine, and was used by pro-Russian forces in Moldova for the manipulative purposes. It was only 12 February 2018 when the new 'anti-propaganda' law that effectively bans Russian broadcasts came into force in Moldova.

Quite often, negative stereotypes and the exaggeration of complications which Ukraine has encountered at its path to Europe are being used to discredit European integration in general. The war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine is used to intimidate a part of Moldovan society and as a counter-argument towards the attempt to weaken political, economic and cultural ties between Moldova and Russia, as well as to limit Russian influence in Moldova. It is widespread speculation that abandoning Russian protectorship will necessarily lead to a crisis in the Russian-Moldovan relations, which, as in Ukrainian case, can bring into a full-scale confrontation.

Sometimes the military operations of Russian troops in the East of Ukraine, as well as the annexation of Crimea, are considered as potential scenarios for Transnistria and Gagauzia. And options for the settlement of Transnistrian problem (in particular, the asymmetric federalization proposed by the so-called Kozak Memorandum²) — are considered as the possible precedents that may subsequently be resorted to Ukraine as well.

Besides the slow-moving reform process, lack of the national governments "success stories" and Russian pressure, both Ukraine and Moldova, meet a problem in growing influence of populist political movements. This trend has gained ground in many EU countries.

This research is aimed at providing the analysis of the sensitive problems inherent in the Ukrainian and Moldovan societies; identifying and refuting distorted representations of Moldovan citizens about Ukraine; investigating to what extent the experience gained by Moldova can be used in Ukraine, and how Moldova may benefit from the Ukrainian experience; outlining the areas of cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and its neighbors, Ukraine and Romania, success in which would contribute to the consolidation of Moldovan society.

¹ Disinformation Resilience in the Central and Eastern Europe http://prismua.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/DRI_CEE_2018.pdf

² Russian Draft Memorandum on the basic principles of the state structure of a united state in Moldova (Kozak Memorandum) 17.03.2003 <https://www.scribd.com/document/192677525/Kozak-Memorandum>

Political situation: conflict factors and consolidation options

Although the Soviet system collapsed over a quarter century ago, the consequences and the legacies of its functioning may be found on the territory of the former Soviet Union republics even today. Overcoming common crisis elements stemming from the Soviet past into the political and social life both in Ukraine and Moldova, which are further spurred by the political establishment, is not an easy task. Its success may be achieved through combining the political will of the ruling elites and the efforts of the expert community and civil society, the ability to identify conflicting and consolidating factors that are commonplace in the countries in question and affect the progress of their domestic and foreign policies, and the aptitude to neutralize conflict potential and take advantage of the consolidation potential.

Post-Soviet syndrome. Russian factor

From the moment of proclaiming its independence and building its statehood, in the political narrative of both countries as well as in their perception in the Western countries, one may observe a constant reference to the burden of the soviet-time heritage which, according to the generally-accepted discourse significantly hampered the intensification of the state transformations and the success of reforms. The analyses³ of the political projects failures or their alienation by population show that they were partly assigned to and explained by post-Soviet traditions and consciousness.

Despite the fact that the many-year traditions of the long-gone Soviet system have firmly rooted into the political consciousness and political culture (or rather lack of it), the explanation and justification of the social and political changes by the past common malignant system only intensified the post-Soviet syndrome and made it difficult to step into a stable development path.

Instead, healthy political competition and transparency of power, modern media, healthy and active civil institutions (whose potential has long been underestimated in Ukraine and Moldova) are able to neutralize the effect of victim which has found itself between the oppressive Soviet past and the favorable European future. In Ukraine the Revolution of Dignity and post-Maidan events since 2014, were the promoters to overcome of the mentioned effect. A great contribution was made by the so-called "decommunization" legislative package⁴ adoption in spring 2015, as well as language and cultural "Ukrainization". Moldova is witnessing the similar processes, although so-called Twitter-revolution of 2009 is not identical to Revolution of Dignity and the attempts of "de-russification" of Moldova are facing the resistance of pro-Russian forces and also ambiguous perception on the part of the people. Common for both countries is the so-called "Russian factor" showing itself by the fact that from the 90's Kremlin was trying to constantly influence the internal and external policy of Ukraine and Moldova by resorting to the economic and energy leverage, media influence and manipulative appeals to culture, language and religion as the components of "soft power" to promote the ideas of so-called "Russian world", and further to wage the hybrid war directed also, among other things, to the discrediting the "European idea" among Ukrainian and Moldovan population. In addition, Russia, acting in violation of all the international norms, is directly supporting the separatist forces in conflicts in the territory of both countries — in Transnistria (Moldova) and in Donbass (Ukraine), obstructing a peaceful settlement of the situation and increasing destabilization in the region.

³ Riabchuk, M. (2009) 'Cultural Fault Lines and Political Divisions' in Zaleska Onyshkevych L.M.L. & Rewakowicz M.G. (eds) Contemporary Ukraine on the Cultural Map of Europe (New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc.)

⁴ On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Regimes, and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols, <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/317-19>; On the Access to the Archives of the Repressive Authorities of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917-1991, <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/316-19>; The Law offers immortalization of victory over Nazism in World War II of 1939-1945, <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/315-19>; On the legal status and honouring the memory of the fighters for the independence of Ukraine in XX-th century, <http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/314-19>.

Corruption

Both countries have had in common the corruption in the public sector. The Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2017 rated Ukraine and Moldova at the adjacent places where Moldova was one point ahead of Ukraine (30th and 31st places accordingly)⁵. It is revealing that the level of corruption is in correlation with inequality of distribution of power and the disparity of the financial wellbeing of the population which, in its turn, poses the risks of growing populism and further support of populists on the part of the population⁶.

Analysis carried out by Freedom House named the problem of corruption in both countries among the main obstacles of implementation and success of reforms. Ukraine and Moldova were ranked immediately close to each other in the freedom rating (61st and 62nd places accordingly in 2017 and 2018). As Freedom House pointed out the impotence in the possibility of rooting out high-level corruption in Ukraine damages the prestige of the Government, decreases the effectiveness of the reforms and weakens the Western support (which may be demonstrated by the reaction to breaking out the investigation of high-level corruption and arrest of the officials from the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine)⁷. Similarly, Moldova is suffering from corruption among high-ranking officials which calls into question the functioning of the judicial system⁸. The corruption vacuum endangers the healthy development of the society hereby influencing a whole range of spheres of public and political life and constantly compromises the European aspirations of both countries.

⁵ Corruption Perceptions Index 2017, https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017

⁶ Corruption and inequality: How Populists Mislead People, by Finn Heinrich, 25 January 2017, https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_and_inequality_how_populists_mislead_people

⁷ Ukraine Profile, Freedom in the World Scores, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/ukraine>

⁸ Moldova Profile, Freedom in the World Scores, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/moldova>

Political and social "pendulum-like" relations between the West and the East

Former President Yanukovich's long-running efforts of balancing between the West and the East in a geopolitical confrontation unfolding around one particular region proved to be inefficient led to failure in Ukraine. Political uncertainty or lack of consensus among the political elites made difficult enough geopolitical quest even more complicated. All this was accompanied by Russia's desire to keep Ukraine on its short leash by all possible means, including the annexation of the Crimea and the deployment of a military conflict in the Donbass. All this demonstrated that fluctuation "between the options" in foreign-political relations eventually leads into a trap. With consideration for the experience of Ukraine the pro-European coalition in Moldovan Parliament must adhere to the uncompromising stance in foreign policy course not deviating from the pro-European agreements achieved.

In its turn, the lack of unity in the characterization of the country's foreign policy course by the politicians was also projected onto the conflict of Western and Eastern values, which manifested itself in the support of pro-European and pro-Russian integrational formations which was differently expressed by the population. Such a difference in social preferences, often reflecting regional particularities of the country (for example, the western regions of Ukraine, whose populations traditionally supported European integration, and the eastern regions, which were leaning towards cooperation with integrational formation headed by the Russian Federation⁹), can be used by policy makers to obtain more votes during the elections, capitalized by Kremlin adherents, local oligarchs, etc.

⁹ Further to the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and commencement of the military conflict in Donbass support of cooperation with Eurasian Union hardly reaching the 5 % threshold.

Europeanization as a consolidation factor

Ukraine and Moldova are participating in the Eastern Partnership initiated by the European Union and consider it to be not only a platform for active political and economic dialogue, but also nurture aspirations for the European integration (despite the fact that the Eastern Partnership has never envisaged membership prospects). In the course of the ongoing dialogue the countries — members of the Eastern partnership were offered the political association and economic integration in the form of Association Agreements (AA), which also stipulate for the execution of Agreement on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). Ukraine and Moldova entered into the AA in 2014 contrary to Russia's forming serious challenges towards the EU transformational tasks regarding the stabilization and modernization of the region. The AA and DCFTA with Moldova entered into legal force from 01 July 2016. Corresponding agreements with Ukraine entered into force one year earlier — on 01 September 2017, which was conditioned by the complication of the procedure of the internal ratification because of the referendum organized in the Netherlands. In addition, both Ukraine (from 11 June 2017) and Moldova (from 28 April 2014) are enjoying visa-free regime with the EU countries which considerably intensifies interpersonal contacts. Visa-free regime may also be viewed as a reward for the implemented reforms and consequently as a precaution, as soon as in case of curbing the reforms and continuation of corruption practices the EU may launch a procedure of suspension of visa-free regime.

Despite the overwhelming support of the European course in Ukraine, the European identity among the Ukrainians not strongly pronounced. It must be said that as of autumn last year (2017) 42.8 % of Ukrainians do not associate themselves with the Europeans and around 20.1 % did not give the decisive answer. However, 37.6 % of the population express their European identity. The European identity among Ukrainians is, although slowly but steadily, growing. For example, only 31.7 % of Ukrainians associated themselves with the Europeans. The fundamental factors for the European identity of Ukrainians are represented by the level of financial wellbeing (68.6%) and the feeling of being protected by the law (48.4%)¹⁰.

¹⁰ All-Ukrainian poll was carried out within the research project organized by St. Gallen University's Center for Culture and Governance in 2015 and 2017 in all regions of Ukraine except Crimea and occupied territories of Donetsk and Lugansk Regions. In 2013 the poll was carried out in all regions. Each poll covered 6000 participants aged over 18.

Political stability, war between Russia and Ukraine and search for international support

Four years of conflict between Ukraine and Russia have intensified the discussions about the similarities between unrecognized Transnistria and events in Ukraine. Putting it even more broadly: the narrative inherent in Moldavian political discourse is the assertion that any escalation in relations with Russia can lead to the so-called "Ukrainian scenario". In this case, the signs of the above scenario have "apocalyptic" attributes: the demise of the economy, the so-called "Civil war", general destabilization, etc.

Actually, in addition to the similar features of Russia's actions carried out in different periods against both countries — Moldova and Ukraine — one may simultaneously observe a correlation between the events happening in two countries today and possible similarities that have conflicting potential (the contrasting of the EU and Russia in the internal discourse, the relationship between the center and regions, special status issues for separatist regions, etc.). Shortly before the Moldova's election, the Ukrainian issue or the situation existing in problematic Gagauzia and Transnistria can be used both in the election campaign and in order to intensify the conflict potential within the Moldovan society: some political forces may use the threat of a "Ukrainian scenario" to consolidate their own electorate.

However, in this context, the differences between the situation in Ukraine and Moldova must be clarified, and the myths intertwined with the false narratives used by certain political forces in the Republic of Moldova and their supporters in third countries, in particular the Russian Federation, must be refuted.

As regards to the Transnistrian region, known as the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR), and Gagauzia, the situation in two regions is different. Not only because of the different legal status of the regions, the different history of regulatory processes which happened in the early 90's, but also because of the great influence on the domestic political situation in Moldova. The considerable attention paid to the conflicts settlement in Transnistria is in sharp contrast (up to silencing at times) with the problems confronting Gagauzia. Under the present-day circumstances, the PMR may be compared with Donbas — the

maintenance of the Russian military presence there is a prerequisite for the preservation of the *status quo*. While Gagauzia may be provisionally compared to Crimea. Undoubtedly, the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea played a decisive role in its annexation by Russia. At the same time, a number of features inherent in both Gagauzia and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea have similar signs: economic interconnection, incitement of dissatisfaction with central authorities and manipulation with local elites were and are remaining the key aspect of preserving Russian influence in both of these regions.

The complexities are resulting from the absence of a unified position in Moldova regarding the PMR's future and the prospects for its reintegration (generally, this problem is also characteristic in Ukraine). This is all due to both different approaches taken by Moldova's President and the Government of Moldova and the statements similar to those announced in November 2017, when the President of Moldova, I. Dodon, stated that the PMR should decide if they are willing to return to Moldova or become a part of Ukraine¹¹. Such statements are destabilizing not only for the peace process in general, but also are discrediting Ukraine, which is one of the official intermediaries and guarantors of the settlement of the Transnistrian problem, as they question Kyiv's neutrality (which represents, in essence, a political and informational attack against Ukraine).

These statements are posing danger because they are accompanied by periodic surges of propaganda about Ukraine's potential attack against the PMR. They considerably intensified during the period when Mikhail Saakashvili headed the Odessa Region State Administration. However, Russian-language media have been stoking this idea up to the present moment. There are many articles whose key message is: "during three years of conflict in Donbas Kyiv has been trying to blackmail Moscow by "Moldovan factor" and threatened to open a "second front" in

¹¹ Kyiv plans to exchange Crimea to the Transnistrian. 15.11.2017 <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2017/11/15/v-kyieve-zadumalis-ob-obmene-kryma-na-pridnestrove.html>

Transnistria ..."¹². It is noteworthy that this also served as a kind of fictitious excuse for holding regular military exercises in the Transnistrian region¹³.

The possibility of the PMR's blockade

The most evident lessons which Moldova may learn from Ukraine's events are related, in particular, to the question of "blockading" the separatist regions. Introduction of limiting requirements towards the goods from the PMR, the need for submitting Moldovan documents, etc., has numerously sparked sharp critics from Tiraspol, as well as from Moscow, where any actions were automatically tagged as the blockade of the region. The modes of economic interaction and the issues related to the checkpoints are relevant also in this context (demonstrative here are the speculations in this regard and imposing of the narrative about the "blockade" without any substantiated grounds).

There is a paradoxical situation when, on the one hand, the actions of the Ukrainian and Moldovan governments were often caused by the need to comply with the terms of the Association Agreements or the visa-free regime with the EU (matters of security and border control respectively), and, on the other hand, leaving the PMR outside the process of discussing such events has caused a negative reaction from the representatives of the EU and OSCE. In such way, in July 2017, the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, and the Prime Minister of Moldova, Pavel Philip, launched a joint border and customs control at the "Kuchurgan-Pervomaisk" crossing point. Accordingly, Ukrainian and Moldovan border guards and customs officers together with representatives of EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) will work to ensure border security. The so-called "Transnistrian deputies" and the Russian mass media immediately called it "a provocation, intensification of

the blockade and the violation of previously achieved agreements",¹⁴ hereby making the "blockade" narrative even more intensive. And the Head of the PMR even made a statement that "regaining of the control by Chisinau over its eastern border is a step towards joining NATO and the EU and is the attack on the Russia's interests".¹⁵ Similarly, Ukraine's experience in the spring of 2017 demonstrated that the EU countries take a very negative approach towards any blockade of uncontrolled territories, as they see it as an attempt to exacerbate the conflict situation. Consequently, when establishing a common border regime, it is extremely important for the Moldovan authorities to keep all the participants of the negotiations, which are carried out under the 5+2 format, well informed. In addition, any tight blockade leads to an intensification of cooperation or insistence on gaining urgent economic assistance from the Russian Federation, which justifies not only its intervention into the situation, but also the fueling tensions in the mass media.

The EU is usually supporting an inclusive approach to conflict regions. It means that the EU gives preference to the absence of artificial additional barriers, especially in the social and economic sphere, which is based on the assumption that involvement of separatist regions may likely lead to more active reintegration. The only controversial issue is the fight against smuggling, which is not to be sacrificed for the sake of inclusiveness.

Deployment and long-term operation of the EUBAM, including on the Transnistrian section of the Ukrainian-Moldovan border, allows for more active involvement of the EU in the peace process and a unifying factor for trilateral border cooperation.

¹² Aleksander Nosovych. Ukraine is threatening to play the "Transnistrian card", 19.07.2017 <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/19072017-ukraina-grozit-razygrat-pridnestrovskuyu-kartu/>

¹³ Experts of IDIS Viitorul criticized the activities of OSCE mission in Moldova, 27.03.2018 <https://point.md/ru/novosti/politika/eksperty-idis-viitorul-raskritikovali-deiatelnost-missii-obsve-v-moldove>

¹⁴ New conflict: Ukraine to deploy the military of Moldova at the border with the PMR. 27.02.2017. <https://regnum.ru/news/2243201.html>

¹⁵ Svetlana Gamova. Moldova starts forceful reintegration of Transnistria. 18.07.2017. http://www.ng.ru/cis/2017-07-18/1_7031_moldova.html

Federalization

If Ukraine is able to take good advantage of Moldova's experience in the deployment of peacekeeping forces or international mediation formats, then Ukrainian experience in federalization and decentralization may be useful for Moldova.

Back in 2003, the so-called "Kozak plan" was proposed, which envisaged the transformation of Moldova into a federation, where Transnistria and Gagauzia would receive broad powers up to blocking foreign policy decisions of Chisinau. Similar conditions were later forwarded concerning Donbass (it is possible to assume that Moscow in such way is testing the negotiation process with the Western countries and Kyiv, as well as Chisinau, for the so-called "red lines").

Recently, the discussions on the potential preparation by Russia of a new settlement plan "Kozak-2" have also intensified. The appointment of Dmitry Kozak as a special representative of the Russian Federation in trade and economic relations with Moldova, considering for the weak trade turnover between the two countries, as well as for the previous portfolio of the "new" special representative to Moldova, are presented as confirmation of the said. At the same time, in the opinion of some Russian experts, the appointment of D.Kozak may indicate a certain change in the position advocated by D. Rogozin — "the PMR is the priority"¹⁶

The appointment of D. Kozak as the representative for Moldova, and not the PMR (as it was earlier) may serve as the evidence of Moscow's hopes that Moldova is not automatically pro-European and the cooperation with it has to be intensified. Such cooperation may go beyond the settlement of Transnistrian federalization plans, and, taking advantage of the elections and falling ratings of the pro-European parties of Moldova, lead to "pulling" Chisinau from Brussels, in particular through promises of concessions in the PMR problems. The victory of the pro-Russian forces in Moldovan par-

liamentary elections may create additional conditions for such course of events.

Gagauzia

In turn, Gagauzia poses a significant problem, which has been exacerbating since February 2014. Having focused their efforts on the situation with the PMR, the European community, as well as, in the first place Chisinau itself, are not paying attention to the complications in Gagauz-Yeri. Sometimes, almost deliberate ignorance of the Comrat's claims can be observed because of the fear of greater autonomy. As a result, such policy implemented by the central governmental authorities leads to an even greater leaning of the region towards the Russian Federation, and, correspondingly, to Moscow's coming on to the local politicians, as well as to the neglect of certain actions of Chisinau, such as, for example, prohibition of broadcasting Russian news programs.

As far as on 02 February 2014 two referendums — legislative and advisory — were held in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (ATU). Within the framework of the legislative referendum the voters were supposed to answer "yes" or "no" to the question: "Will you agree to accept the attached draft law of the ATU Gagauzia "On the postponed status of the people of Gagauzia to external self-determination", which allows the people of Gagauzia to realise their right to self-determination if the Republic of Moldova changes its status of an independent state?". The whole essence of the draft law was concentrated in its first article: "Change of the Republic of Moldova status as an independent state will lead to formation in the territory of compact settlement of the Gagauz people (ATU Gagauzia) of the independent state of Gagauzia". Such a change was considered a possible association with Romania, or sometimes there were speculations about potential joining NATO, accession to the EU and loss of the neutral status. At the 'consultative'" referendum the voters were to answer two questions: "Do you approve the foreign policy course for the development of the Republic of Moldova aimed at joining the Customs Union (Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan)?" and "Do you approve the foreign

¹⁶ Andrey Deviatkov: "When I read how Moldova is viewed from Russia I start having a preinfarction syndrome". 23.07.2018 <https://www.europalibera.org/a/interview-andrey-devyatkov-russia-dmitry-kozak-moldova-transnistria-europe-usa/29384356.html>

policy course of the Republic of Moldova aimed at joining the European Union?". Then, 97.22% of the voters were against the course of Moldova's accession to the EU.

The situation in 2014 demonstrated that, instead of conducting the explanatory campaign about the benefits of European integration, Chisinau was willing to use court prohibitions and financial interruptions. Consequently, Gagauzia was increasingly approaching the European integration ideas with negativity, as they were associated with the general policy of the center in relation to the region. Moreover, in 2014, the referendum was often justified by the need to attract attention to the region, absence of adequate funding for development, etc. In this case, Ukraine's experience of decentralization, especially in terms of redistribution of funds between the center and the regions, may prove to be useful for reducing conflict-related potential in certain regions of Moldova.

Participation of citizens of Moldova and the PMR's residents in armed conflicts in Donbass and Crimea

The problem that has a bilateral and regional influence is the participation of Moldovan citizens, mostly the residents of the PMR in hostilities in the Donbass. Already in 2018, the Information and Security Service (ISS) of Moldova identified 56 mercenaries who fought on the side of pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas. According to the ISS, 18 of them were detained and about 15 persons were already sentenced. According to unofficial data, there are over 100 Moldovan mercenaries fighting in Ukraine.¹⁷

In 2016 the Security Service of Ukraine informed only about 40 Moldovan citizens coming mostly from the territory of the PMR.¹⁸ Despite the active interaction between the law enforcement agencies of both

countries regarding this matter, nonetheless there is a need to keep the citizens of Moldova and the PMR better informed about the criminal liability for participation in military conflicts abroad, which is punishable by imprisonment of up to 10 years.

At the same time, it should be noted that not only ordinary mercenaries, but also instructors and heads of security services from the PMR take part in the armed conflict in Donbas. The well-known is the case of Vladimir Antyufeyev, the former Head of the PMR's Ministry for State Security, who was engaged in the organization of structures similar to the State Security Committee in Donbass.¹⁹ Already in April 2018, Moldovan law enforcement agencies once again detained instructors from the PMR, who rendered assistance to the unrecognized Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics. An important factor is that such detentions have been occurring due to cooperation between Ukraine and Moldova.²⁰

Ukrainian minorities in Moldova and the PMR

The important issue in the context of the development of both conflicts also remains the position of the Ukrainian minority both in Moldova, as well as in the PMR. Unfortunately, during its independence Moldova treated them as the Russian-speaking community, rather than a separate ethnic group. As a result, in 2014 most members of the Ukrainian community in Moldova did not take a pro-Ukrainian stance. The same happened in the territory of the PMR. The Ukrainian community was under the tremendous influence of Russian mass media information resources and artificially contrived belief in the threat of Romanization. Before 2014, Ukrainians living in the PMR were mostly leaning towards Moscow and Kyiv, then after the Maidan, the Ukrainian community took a silent stance.

¹⁷ Moldovan special forces revealed 56 mercenaries who fought for Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics 21.07.2018. http://ipress.ua/news/spetssluzhby_moldovy_vyavyly_56_naymantsiv_yaki_voyuvaly_zaldr_261161.html

¹⁸ Security Service of Ukraine: citizens of Moldova are fighting in Donbass on the side of the guerillas. 24.02.2016. <https://point.md/ru/novosti/obshchestvo/sbu58-na-storone-boevikov-v-donbasse-voyuyut-moldavane>

¹⁹ Kremlin's agents from Transnistria in Donbass. 21.08.2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erRkmzXg8Vk>

²⁰ "Instructors" from Transnistria who fought alongside the guerillas in Donbass detained in Moldova. 17.04.2018. <https://www.unian.net/society/10083854-v-moldove-zaderzhali-instruktorov-iz-pridnestrovyia-sotrudnichavshih-s-boevikami-na-donbasse.html>

The experience of overcoming the Soviet and Russian political legacy

A controversial topic often used by Russian mass media and pro-Russian political forces in Moldova is the process of decommunization and getting rid of the Soviet legacy in Ukraine. This process was initiated by the Laws of Ukraine "On the Conviction of the Communist and National-Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and the Prohibition propaganda of their symbols", "On access to Archives of Repressive Agencies of Totalitarian Communist Regime of 1917-1991", "On immortalization of victory over Nazism in World War II of 1939-1945" and "On the Legal Status and Honoring the Memory of Fighters for Independence of Ukraine in the XX Century". Adoption of such laws was facilitated by the fact that in the early parliamentary elections in 2014 it was the first time when the representatives of the Communist party were not presented in the Verkhovna Rada, and the representatives of the former Party of Regions were in minority. A pro-European coalition was formed mainly by a new political generation representatives. Therefore, unlike the "predecessors", these deputies generally did not feel "piety" before the Soviet "values" and were ready to adopt the corresponding changes.²¹

It is improbable that the new the parliament of Moldova will adopt and implement the corresponding legislation. However, if it happens, the government and parliament of the Republic of Moldova should be prepared that such steps can lead to a wide public and expert discussion, as well as may draw attention of the international institutions, as it had already happened, in particular, with Moldovan Parliament's attempt to prohibit the use of communist symbols by political forces in Moldova.²²

Historical substantiation of decommunization and getting rid of communist heritage

It should be pointed out that in Ukraine the expediency and effectiveness of laws sometimes become the subject of heated discussions. At the same time, as shows the experience gained during the recent years, their adoption was caused the historical necessity.

From the moment of pronouncement of its independence, the Ukrainian establishment avoided real decommunization fearing deterioration of relations with Russia. According to the renowned American researcher James Mace: "There was a great deal of hypocrisy in the Soviet ideological doctrine. While pretending to reject any kind of nationalism, it cultivated the Big Brother myth, the "great and mighty Russian language," the "language of interethnic communication," Russian literature and culture as a standard-bearer of world literature and culture, Russian history as that of the Russian people constantly freeing other peoples from the social and national yoke. That was how all the wars of aggression of the Russian tsars and the assimilation of other peoples by Russia's more advanced culture were justified"²³. During the Soviet Union period of existence Ukraine and Moldova totally experienced the influence of such doctrinal principles of the USSR. No efforts directed towards decommunization over the years of independence led both states to be unprepared for active use by modern Russia of the Soviet legacy to advance the current goals of Russia's expansive foreign policy.

²¹ Bogdan Korolenko, Maxim Mayorov. Burial of gods. How Ukraine is getting rid of totalitarian legacy. 30.11.2015. <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/152412>

²² On control of the constitutional nature of certain provisions related to prohibition of communist symbols and propaganda of totalitarian ideologies. 04.06.2013. http://base.spinform.ru/show_doc.fwx?rgn=61737

²³ James Mace. The Social-Genetic Legacy of Genocide in Ukraine and Ways to Overcome It. 26.11.2010 <https://day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/panorama-dnya/cocialno-genetichna-spadshchina-genocidu-i-totalitarizmu-v-ukrayini-ta-shlyahi>

Utilizing of Soviet legacy by the Russian Federation

Throughout the period of Vladimir Putin being in power, Moscow has been increasingly utilizing Soviet past to form new imperial myths such as the cult of the "Great Victory" and "unified nation", which created the preconditions for the idea of "Russian spring" when "its supporters were mostly organizing their demonstrations using Soviet era symbols on the central squares of big cities in the South and East of Ukraine near the monuments of Lenin. Soviet names and symbols were used not as a reference to the historical past, but rather as a justification of the ongoing expansion of the Russian Federation.²⁴ Russian and Soviet collective identification symbols decorated with relevant regional themes and ethnographic myths contributed to the emergence of revanchist regional political identities on which separatism thrives. For example, the terrorist organization Donetsk People's Republic relies on both the Bolshevik symbols and the short-term separatist history of Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic of 1918. Certain analogies can be found also in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova.²⁵ As it is rightly pointed out by the experts of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, "In post-Soviet realities the hybrid identity, which is usually fundamentally Russian-centric, considers Kamchatka, Transnistria, Sevastopol, and the Caucasus as a "native home", meaning that the entire former imperial area thinks as a single space, in other words — as endless homelessness, a homogeneous total space with the elements of "regional exoticism", through which the substitution of the existence of other nations and nationalities has taken place".²⁶

A lot has been accomplished in an attempt to neutralize this trend and implement the legislative provisions on decommunization — according to the director of the Institute of National Remembrance, "987

settlements and 52 thousand of toponyms in various settlements were renamed, almost 2,500 monuments were dismantled, in particular, more than 1.5 thousand Lenin's monuments".²⁷

At the same time, the new names in many cases were historically authentic and contributed to the correction of the situation enforced during the Soviet period era when the unified model was used in naming the streets and squares of all towns and cities. The central squares usually had the following names: Lenin Square, October Revolution Square, Soviet Square, Peace Square etc. Similar names were given to the towns' central streets: Lenin, Karl Marx, Engels, Kalinin, Ordzhonikidze, Zhdanov etc.²⁸

In addition, the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance organizes a comprehensive study of Ukrainian statehood history, the stages of the struggle for the restoration of statehood and the distribution of corresponding information in Ukraine and around the world, the study of historical heritage and the promotion of integration into the Ukrainian society of national minorities and indigenous peoples, overcoming historical myths.²⁹ The Institute of National Remembrance is also involved into drafting legal documents regulating the decommunization and desovietization issues, as well as prepares teaching materials for schools, universities and the media.

²⁴ Bogdan Korolenko, Maxim Mayorov. Burial of gods. How Ukraine is getting rid of totalitarian legacy. 30.11.2015. <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/152412>

²⁵ Astafiev A. Impact of Russian imperial mentality onto the social and cultural alienation in Ukraine: ways to overcome it. <http://www.niss.gov.ua/articles/1821/>

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Viatrovych: decommunization is mental reinterpretation of the communist past. 30.05.2018 <http://intvua.com/news/politics/1527685070-v-yatrovich-dekomunizatsiya---tse-mentalne-pereosmislennya.html>

²⁸ Larysa Masenko. How to get rid of the Soviet legacy in the toponymy. 18.06.2013. <https://day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/podrobici/yak-pozbutisya-radyanskoyi-spadshchini-v-toponimiyi>

²⁹ Regulation on the Regulation on the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. <http://www.memory.gov.ua/page/polozhennya-pro-ukrainskii-institut-natsionalnoi-pamyati>

Decommunization and nationalism

Sometimes Ukraine is accused of the fact that decommunization resulted in the appearance of the ideological niche, which was created after the collapse of the Soviet Union and deepened in the process of decommunization and desovietization, and this niche is being gradually filled with nationalism triggered by the Russian aggression.

Radical nationalists are often considered to be the driving force of the Revolution of Dignity. At the same time the nationalism is depicted in its darkest colors. Such practice is used with the purpose of discreditation of the participants of the Revolution.

The counterarguments that can be used to refute such a simplified understanding of the revolutionary events in Ukraine in 2013-2014 can be found in the writings of the renowned scholar researching nationalism and far-right ultra-nationalists in Ukraine, Anton Shekhovtsov, who states, in particular: "1) Euromaidan, among other things, is the national revolution against the Kremlin imperialism and the national uprising against the destructive influence exerted by Russia onto Ukraine. Most people supporting Ukrainian radical nationalists do not share their views, but aspire for true independence of Ukraine. It means that far-right ultra-nationalists can only be neutralized when Ukraine receives national independence. The radical right wing is being constantly reinforced by constant threat to Ukrainian statehood, rather than the foreseeable growth of right-wing views in the Ukrainian society. 2) Despite the fact that Ukrainian radical nationalists approved and resorted to violence against the corruption and authoritarian regime of Viktor Yanukovich and brutal Policy men who beat and tortured the protesters, they were not the only force fighting at the Euromaidan. On the Hrushevskogo Street they were joined by many of the Ukrainian leftists and democrats, who were radicalized because of no success of non-violent resistance in the country which was slipping into a dictatorship"³⁰

Another problem is that even the experts known for the good understanding of the political process in Ukraine and for their favorable attitude towards it sometimes resort to criticizing the nationalism. For example, the German researcher, Andreas Umland, believes that "The wrong turn taken after Euromaidan is a policy of remembrance, which is currently carried being in such way that, in particular, the organization of Ukrainian nationalists is being praised as a certain standard of Ukrainian patriotism and Ukrainian national self-awareness. This gives birth to great problems in external relations. There are a number of internal problems associated with it because it is not supported by the entire Ukrainian population"³¹ He also states that "Nationalism, which was prayed by Bandera and Shukhevych, was anti-Western, anti-European, anti-Semitic, and anti-Polish, therefore, it is not suitable for the European integration of Ukraine. This is causing problems with Ukraine's partners in the West, in particular Poland and Germany. This is a problem for Germany, because Shukhevych was not only commander in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA), but also a Nazi collaborator ..."³²

However, his arguments are dismissed by the well-known Ukrainian researcher and publicist, Vice-President of the Ukrainian Centre for International PEN Club, Mykola Ryabchuk, who claims that under Leonid Kuchma's presidency, a commission of the reputable scholars was set up, which was entrusted to perform thorough the study and evaluation of the role of the UIA. After several years of work the commission has come to a generally foreseeable conclusion: that the UIA fought the Nazis and the Soviets for the freedom and independence of Ukraine, that it had both bright and dark pages in its history, but in total it has no impact onto the general national liberation nature of its struggle and does not deny the fact that

opinions/shcho-zakhodu-potribno-znaty-pro-kraynikh-pravykh-na-evromaydani

³¹ Andreas Umland. Nationalism of Bandera and Shukhevych was anti-European and anti-Semitic and does not fit Ukraine's European integration. 08.09.2016. <https://ua.112.ua/mnenie/natsionalizm-bandery-i-shukhevycha-buv-antyeuropeiskym-i-antysemitskym-i-ne-pidkhodyt-dlia-ievrointehratsii-ukrainy-336981.html>

³² Ibidem.

³⁰ Anton Shekhovtsov. What the West needs to know about the far-right ultra-nationalists at Euromaidan. 02.2014. <https://krytyka.com/ua/solutions/>

all UIA soldiers and commanders who did not commit war crimes or crimes against humanity deserve official recognition and respect as fighters for the independence of Ukraine. "There is no reason to idealize all members of the UIA... But it's equally unjust to demonize all of them, as it was done by the Soviets and is still being done by Moscow and pro-Moscow propaganda."³³

There is a difference between the dominant nationalism and nationalism of the oppressed nation. If the goal of the first is to retain power over other nations, the task of nationalism of the oppressed nation is to defeat the oppressor.

The attempts to justify by the nationalism the formation of paramilitary structures, the provocative actions of which compromise the idea of nationalism as a whole, and the activities of which are illegal and aimed at incitement to hostility are posing the threat. The engagement of such groups by certain political forces, or their registration as political forces, can take place both in Ukraine and in Moldova, and will provide fertile soil for the activities of pro-Russian propagandists and will unite pro-Russian electorate.

At the same time, unlike in Ukraine, Romanian nationalism is usually an alternative to decommunization in Moldova (at least in the pro-Russian media).

Church matters

The events of the Revolution of Dignity, as well as Russia's aggression towards Ukraine also brought into the foreground the role of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate — UOC (MP) in Ukraine. As of the beginning of 2018 it has over 12 church units in Ukraine.³⁴ At the same time, illegal armed formations on the territory of the so-called

Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics openly declared their commitment to Moscow Orthodox Church and the beginning of a "crusade" in Donbass with the support of the "Russian orthodox army".³⁵ In addition, in 2014, Igor Hirkin, one of the terrorist leaders in the Donetsk People's Republic, together with other militants, received asylum in one of the churches of the UOC MP in the town of Slovyansk where the terrorist also formed his battalion and sanctified his weapons.³⁶

According to a study carried out by Ukrainian Independent Centre for Political Studies, the strengthening of the negative perception of UOC MP by the population is primarily happening due to three factors: 1) the position of the head staff of Russian Orthodox Church: Patriarch Kirill, one of the creators of the "Russian space" ideology, has repeatedly referred to the war in Donbass fratricidal, does not recognize the real intervention of Russia, and has repeatedly made outright negative political statements regarding the Ukrainian state structure. 2) the position of the head staff of UOC MP: official statements of the UOC MP appeal to peace but do not condemn the Russian invasion into the Ukrainian territory, and refer the war waged in Donbass as "civil conflict", "discord and hostility", and "clash of interests of the West and the East". 3) the instances of supporting the anti-state separatist sentiments by certain representatives of the Church: the UOC MP came into the center of mass public discontent, precisely because of the anti-Ukrainian activities of its clergy. In particular, there have been widely publicized facts in the press about the spiritual support of the militants from Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, attempts to disrupt mobilization, appeals to Russia to absorb the territory of Transcarpathia, etc.³⁷

³³ Mykola Ryabchuk. Light from the darkness. Andreas Umland, remembrance about UIA and European integration of Ukraine. 14.01.2017. <http://www.istpravda.com.ua/columns/2017/01/14/149456/>

³⁴ Viktor Kaspruk. Russian language and Moscow church are the instruments of aggression of "Russian space" in Ukraine. 05.08.2018. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29412744.html>

³⁵ Maria Kovalenko, Yulia Kazdobina. Current state of orthodox churches in Ukraine during the war: hopes for unification, oppressions in Donbass and socio-political position. 28.07.2015. http://www.ucipr.org.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=81:aktualn&lang=ua

³⁶ Roman Gankevych. The Security Service of Ukraine is investigating the activities of representatives of UOC MP in Donbass in view of support of the Russian aggression. 31.03.2019. https://zaxid.net/sbu_rozsliduye_diyalnist_predstavnikiv_upts_mp_na_donbasi_u_pidtrimsi_rosiyskoyi_agresiyi_n1453021

³⁷ Maria Kovalenko, Yulia Kazdobina. Current state of orthodox churches in

In attempts to weaken the influence of Moscow's patriarchate Ukraine has taken the path of formation of its national church and appealed to the Ecumenical Patriarchate with a corresponding request: the appeal was signed by representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and several bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate³⁸, on the part of the secular authorities — by the president of Ukraine³⁹ (in whose opinion Kremlin is considering Russian Orthodox Church as one of the key instruments of its influence in Ukraine⁴⁰) and by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.⁴¹ This decision must be supported by the majority of votes cast by the Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. If the Tomos about the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine — which is the official document issued by the Patriarch of Constantinople, who officially declares the autocephaly of the Ukrainian church — is truly granted, Ukraine will start having new religious structure able to unite local Orthodox churches that are not subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate.⁴²

However, the future of the church buildings will be decided by their parishes and priests. There will no forceful and compulsory transition of all Orthodox church goes to the newly created church.⁴³ The predictions that provision of the Tomos to Ukraine will strengthen the split and will lead to a religious war

in Ukraine, which are being spread by supporters of the Moscow Patriarchate, are refuted by sociological data, according to which, in general, the establishment of an Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Ukraine is supported by 31% of the total population and 20% of the population are against it. The rest of the population is either indifferent - 35% or do not have a definite answer - 14%. A large part of the population in the regions treats the proposal to create a unified local church with indifference or does not have a definite answer. In the Southern region, there are 66%, in the East - 62%, in Donbass - 53%, in the Central region - 47%, and in the West - 30% of such respondents.⁴⁴

Ukraine during the war: hopes for unification, oppressions in Donbass and socio-political position. 28.07.2015. http://www.ucipr.org.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=81:aktualn&lang=ua

³⁸ Roman Romaniuk. What tomos is and if it requires consent of Russian church. 31.07.2018. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2018/07/31/7187813/>

³⁹ Address of the President of Ukraine to Ecumenical Patriarch Varfolomiy <https://www.president.gov.ua/administration/zvernennya-prezidenta-ukrayini-do-vselskogo-patriarha-varf-438>

⁴⁰ Anastasia Golubeva, Sviatoslav Khomenko. Crossways: how Moscow is obstructing Kyiv in building its own independent church. 26.07.2018. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-44957996>

⁴¹ Decree of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine On Support of the Address of the President of Ukraine to Ecumenical Patriarch Varfolomiy on the provision of Tomos on autocephaly of Orthodox Church in Ukraine. 19.04.2018. <http://zakon0.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2410-19>

⁴² Anastasia Golubeva, Sviatoslav Khomenko. Crossways: how Moscow is obstructing Kyiv in building its own independent church. 26.07.2018. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-44957996>

⁴³ Roman Romaniuk. What tomos is and if it requires consent of Russian church. 31.07.2018. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2018/07/31/7187813/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-presshall/2487869-ci-pidtrimuut-ukrainci-stvorennja-pomisnoi-avtokefalnoi-pravoslavnoi-cerkvi-prezentacia-rezultativ-doslidzenna.html>

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from analysis regarding the similarities and differences and the relevance of Ukrainian experience for the Republic of Moldova, and propose the following recommendations:

Both states desperately need to **reduce their economic and energy dependence from Russia** and to **withdraw completely from the Russian media**. Ukraine has reached a consensus in this regard, but Moldovan President — Igor Dodon — stays loyal to Russia and is often characterized as a pro-Russian politician. Both states must make the dissociation from Russia's influence in political, economic and social respects and take a fully independent course of decision-making and management, which should become the priority in the development of their policies. In this context, the lack of political will amongst the representatives of the Moldavian political classes must be compensated by strengthening of the expert community, civil society, and the formation of trans-border expert and civil networks.

The unique experience of consolidating Ukrainian society under the conditions of war waged with Russia, the phenomenon of the volunteer movement must be studied in Moldova as an example of successful practice. In addition, the experience of mobilizing Ukrainian civil society under the crisis conditions, as well as realization of the cumulative potential of the public sector of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries deserve attention.

In the context of European integration Ukraine and Moldova main tasks remain fighting corruption and ensuring the independence of the judiciary power. After all, the EU's "more for more" principle works indeed: more effective reforms and effective fight against corruption are the keys to getting further support from the West. Both states could take an advantage of the positive experience of neighboring Romania, including by reviewing the best practices by expert communities and civic activists. At the same time, the current developments in Romania should be studied in Ukraine and Moldova for the development of strategies of preventing the combating corruption process' freezing and consolidation of civil society at the time of increasing authoritarian risks.

More attention should be paid to the elaboration of the national projects for the development of common values that would serve as the society consolidating factor, including with the assistance of education and culture. The unity of society will lead to the creation of a synergistic effect.

The task of both states is to achieve national consensus regarding the European perspective. At the same time, instead of waiting for the prospect of membership as a political principle of dialogue in the format of the Eastern Partnership, it is worthwhile, first of all, concentrating on the reforms and the intensified anti-corruption mechanisms by completely transforming European integration narratives from political rhetoric into everyday practices. Powerful, efficient and modernized democracies along with a stable economy will become a consolidating factor that European instruments continue to be the driving force of the reforms. Both Ukraine and Moldova possess all the prerequisites for this, because according to the results of the study⁴⁵ they were evaluated as the most prospective countries of the EaP that able to adopt the sectoral acquis of the European Union.

In this context, it is recommended to strengthen further measures directed at ensuring institutional and social stability. With consideration for the common geopolitical challenges that both countries are facing, as well as challenges having a socio-political nature, it is worth uniting around the idea of the EU, including under

⁴⁵ Tina Freyburg, Sandra Lavenex, Frank Schimmelfennig, Tatiana Skripka and Anne Wetzel. 2015. Democracy Promotion by Functional Cooperation. The European Union and its Neighbourhood. Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century. Palgrave Macmillan, UK.

the format of regional cooperation. In addition, an important role should be assigned to the intensification of cooperation between civil societies of both countries in order to adopt mutual experience regarding the more responsible implementation of structural reforms, including with consideration for the measures provided by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. In addition, the participation of scientists and researchers from both countries in the Erasmus, Jean Monnet and other programs should be encouraged and promoted, which will positively influence the improvement of the internal social potential, interpersonal dialogue, as well as of the EU's image and its perception in both societies.

In addition, Ukraine and Moldova should articulate a common position regarding the need to transform the military peacekeeping operation in Moldova into a Policy operation. The active engagement of the EU representatives into the implementation of this idea will help to balance the position of the OSCE, which supported Russia's position about the possibility of destabilizing the situation by changing the status quo. The positive experience and image of EUBAM may come in handy for the reflection about further engagement of the EU.

It is necessary to understand whether a Transnistrian settlement or Ukrainian conflict roadmap, as well as the aggravation of the relations with the Russian Federation (i.e., the intimidation by Moldova's potentially taking "Ukrainian scenario"), will be used during the 2019 winter elections in Moldova. Probable manipulations with the interpretation of the Ukrainian Maidan's events, ongoing aggression in Donbas and the factor of European integration must be clearly covered by the media, possibly with the involvement of Ukrainian experts and politicians.

More activities are needed to be held with the Ukrainian minority, both on the part of Ukraine and on the part of Moldovan institutions, in order to isolate them from the "Russian-speaking" circles, and, accordingly, from the significant Russian information influence. Creating additional conditions for the development of the Ukrainian community itself can lead to a change in their political position as well.

Analysis of Ukrainian experience of decentralization and use of certain particular elements for cultivating relations with Gagauzia may contribute to the decrease of confrontational and pro-Russian factor in the region.

With regard to the Ukrainian experience of decommunization and overcoming the Russian and Soviet legacy, the attention should be paid to the fact that the sensitive nature of this issue inevitably leads to the national debate. Due to this fact, the opinion leaders and specialists should be engaged into this discussion. The awareness-raising campaign should be carried out among Moldovan citizens about the relevant processes in Ukraine (as well as in other countries of the world where the similar events took place) in order to prevent Russian myths aimed at creating a distorted picture of the decommunization process.

The communist and Soviet narratives are being used by Moscow as an instrument of its ideological dominance, the marking of the space that Russia considers to be its footprint territory or an object of its future expansion. Under these circumstances the executions of decommunization and desovietization are objectively necessary, but a strong opposition from Moscow should be expected. Therefore, the control over structures and their containment is an extremely important task for law enforcement bodies as Ukraine and Moldova. Chisinau should pay attention to the Ukrainian experience as well as to the propaganda clichés used by Russia, launch an expert and public discussion that would reveal the weaknesses and deficiencies of the nationalist movements,

perform classification of the nationalist organizations and self-styled structures in Moldova that use national slogans for performance of unlawful activities and stoking ethnic hatred.

With regard to the church dimension of overcoming the Russian heritage, it seems that the Republic of Moldova unlikely will follow the Ukrainian scenario of getting the Tomos, which does not mean that the Ukrainian experience is irrelevant. Chisinau has to be aware of the fact that: if Moscow loses control over the territories which it considers to be an area of its exclusive interests, it resorts to radical scenarios and may therefore turn to deepening the religious conflict both in Ukraine and in Moldova (first attempts are already being observed when the Romanian Patriarch Daniel is accused of attempting to encroach on the canonical territories of the Moscow Patriarchate).⁴⁶ At the same time, in case of the Republic of Moldova the religious disputes between Romanian and Moscow Patriarchates will intertwine the question of Romanian nationalism⁴⁷, which in case of the predominance of Russian interpretation of this phenomenon will only make the situation complicated and can be used for manipulations during the Moldovan parliamentary campaign.

⁴⁶ Andrey Serebrich. Romanian patriarchate resorts to escalation of relations with Russian Orthodox Church. 25.05.2018. <https://stbasil.center/2018/05/25/romanian-church/>

⁴⁷ Vladimir Burega. Moldova, Romania and the interests of Russian Orthodox Church. 06.08.2010. <https://www.religion.in.ua/main/history/5527-moldaviya-rumyniya-i-interesy-rpc.html>

Political situation and political achievements in Romania

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Romania has a semi-presidential political regime, although the Constitution does not specify variety. It has gone through different phases, from a consolidated parliamentary majority, which supported both the president and the prime minister, to a divided majority, where the president does not enjoy the majority's support with the prime minister gaining an advantage. This type of relation, known in political practice as cohabitation, usually causes turbulence and is ongoing in Bucharest (interestingly, the same is, to a certain extent, relevant for the Romanian neighbors, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, therefore the Romanian experience can be indispensable to Kyiv and Chisinau).

The constitutional reform in 2003 represented a certain shift from the semi-presidentialism form with stronger powers of the president (for example, the 1991 Constitution did not explicitly stipulate that the president may dismiss the prime minister) to semi-presidentialism faded out by parliamentary accents.

Cohabitation is frequent on the Romanian political scene and produces a fragile political equilibrium whose maintenance requires mature politicians, who are more willing to support moderation and institutional solutions rather than hypostatizing the institutional processes and decisions. This is not a common situation in Romania, where legal conflicts between political institutions are as frequent as instances of cohabitation. During cohabitation, political and institutional actors often appeal to the Constitutional Court to get the right institutional directions. Therefore, we can speak of a long series of decisions of the Constitutional Court on the settlement of legal conflicts between institutions. Over the last years, the president, the prime minister, the parliament, and the judiciary system have been calling the Constitutional Court for clarification on their constitutional report.

In December 2016, a new institutional conflict was avoided when the parliamentary elections winner Social-Democratic Party (PSD) could not nominate its leader Liviu Dragnea for prime minister (even before being formally proposed). Liviu Dragnea had got a suspended sentence of two years in jail in a lawsuit on breaking the referendum legislation on President Băsescu's dismissal in 2012. Although PSD's representatives invoked the legitimacy of the popular vote, President Klaus Iohannis announced that he would not nominate a convict as the chief of the government. Law no. 161/2003 on certain measures for ensuring transparency in the exercise of public dignities, public functions and business environment, prevention and sanctioning of corruption stipulates that "members of the Government may be persons who have Romanian citizenship and live in the country, enjoy the exercise of their electoral rights, are not criminal convicts and are not found in one of the cases of incompatibility provided in Book I, Title IV of Law no. 161/2003." The law, submitted to Parliament as long ago as in 1998, was voted just in 2003 during the PSD government and parliamentary majority as a condition for Romania's accession to NATO and the EU (proving the EU's transformative power).

This resulted in an unusual political situation, characterized by fluctuations of trust and distrust of PSD in their own prime minister. Liviu Dragnea and his close team explain that through their need to be sure that the prime minister would not resort to governmental instruments to take over PSD or to undermine the "government program" in favor of other interests. Thus, PSD reached the third cabinet in one year. The first cabinet was dismissed by a vote of censure initiated and supported by PSD against its own government following accusations of its inefficiency in the implementation of the government program. The next prime minister resigned after a broke "confidence relationship" when Dragnea was accused of the interference of a so-called deep state that interfered with government decisions and the administration of justice as a public service.

In this landscape, the former PSD president and prime minister, Victor Ponta (who was, in the meantime, acquitted in court of first instance after a trial based on the National Anti-Corruption Department's criminal file, that took him out of the big politics and state affairs in 2015), plays the card of a progressive center-oriented leader, pretending

to have the know-how of government based on his previous experience. On the one hand, he tries to attract disappointed PSD parliamentarians to the newly established Pro Romania platform. On the other hand, he tries to receive the withdrawn credit from dissatisfaction with the government that was guaranteed by Liviu Dragnea through a systematized governance program that produced great expectations among the Romanians but is implemented at least in an unpredictable manner and apparently posing certain risks to the economy.

In view of the above, one can easily see that the importance of the government in the state architecture in Romania derives from the fact that it is the one that organizes and effectively manages the society by governing the commons and distributing the public resources. This is directly related to the welfare in society and leads to frequent dissatisfaction with the governmental policies. Since public policy solutions target public interest as widely as possible, governmental practice shows that public policy solutions always discriminate against individual preferences. In addition, the public interest is defined by the political program and the priorities of the ruling party. However, this can also represent an additional argument to increase the legitimacy of governmental decisions through transparency, public consultation, and communication with the citizens.

Romania: from semi-presidentialism accentuated by the president to semi-presidentialism attenuated by the parliamentary majority

The Main Political Actors in Romania

In December 2016, the Romanians elected their representatives to the legislative forum at a 39.49% voter turnout, which was lower than in the previous elections. The new parliamentary majority, centered on the Social Democratic Party and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (the political party chipped by former Prime Minister Călin Popescu Tăriceanu from the National Liberal Party), formed the new government with support of representatives of the national minorities (which usually support the parliamentary majority) and the Hungarians' Democratic Union in Romania. In order to support candidates of the national minorities in elections, the legislation does not require creating a political party, allowing non-governmental organizations to run in elections as well. However, the electoral system applies an electoral threshold at the national level, the distribution of mandates being made at the county level only to those parties that have obtained enough votes to exceed the electoral threshold. According to art. 62, par. 2 of the Constitution of Romania: "The organizations of citizens belonging to national minorities, which do not meet the number of votes required to be represented after the elections in Parliament, have the right to one deputy seat under the electoral law. Citizens of a national minority can only be represented by one organization". Thus, the representation of most of the minorities would be impossible without the reserved seats. The Constitution and the Electoral Law guarantee the representation of national minorities in the Chamber of Deputies. If several organizations represent the same minority in elections and none succeeds in gaining representation through the electoral competition, the organization that obtained the highest number of votes is the one to get the reserved mandate. Usually, the Hungarians' Democratic Union in Romania gets at least 5% of votes in elections, so they do not appeal for the reserved seat. On the contrary, with its 30 deputies and senators, the Hungarians can negotiate to form or to remove the government.

The political opposition is now formed by the National Liberal Party, Save Romania Union - a party at its first term in parliament, established on civic bases, and the People's Movement Party initiated by the

former President Traian Băsescu (whose political group in the Senate has been wiped out recently as a result of migration of its MPs to other parties). Although reclaiming from the right-wing, these three parties did not run in elections on a common platform and generally do not take collective action.

Although the electoral arena ensured equal influence for all citizens in the parliamentary elections of 2016, it seems that the Romanian society was split into those who supported the classic institutionalized politicians (what is usual for a democracy recently consolidated after the communist period) and those who supported new different politicians, who left behind the politicians from the traditional parties accused of slowing down any kind of progress in Romania.

On this background, the anti-corruption agenda became successful and almost indistinguishable from the political narratives. The trust in justice and the judiciary system registered a consolidated increase during 2014-2015, for then declined in polls, on the background of bringing into the public sphere almost any criminal investigation of politicians, the fact that was encouraged by all stakeholders, from the politicians to the representatives of the judiciary system. Whereas civil trials represent more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the processes in courts, which are hardly effective in scheduling court appearances and passing resolutions, the penal justice got the front seat - the funds as well, but this seems not enough to ensure an increase in incomes to the national budget as a result of solved corruption matters.

Nevertheless, the Eurobarometer results on "Trust in National Institutions" should be read in the context of a trend maintained by the low trust of Romanians in political institutions. In comparison with political institutions, the justice, the army, and the Policy enjoy a relatively high level of trust. However, amidst the politicization of the public debate on justice, the confidence in justice and the judiciary system collapsed by 13% in 2016 as compared to 2015, from 48% to 36%, and by 11% from 46% in 2014. The trust remains low in 2017 and 2018 too: 36% in 2017 and 42% in 2018, though not too far from the European average of 45%.

From Civic Involvement to Political Involvement. The Technocracy Experiment and the First Parliamentary Party Legitimated by the "Street"

The usual street protests of 2008 gave rise to the emergence of a new "political" actor: "the street", the one that led to the 2012 and 2015 government falls (notably, both neighboring Ukraine and Moldova also had similar experience). Moreover, President Iohannis almost formalized the role of the street when, in November 2015, after the resignation of the Ponta government, he initiated two rounds of consultations for forming a new government: the first round was institutional, with parliamentary parties, but the second one was unusual, held with the representatives of the civil society and Victoria Square (where people protested). Although it was in excess of the Constitution (but not in contradiction with it), the President then referred to that special round of consultations as being necessary *ad hoc*. At that time, there were civil society representatives that declined President Iohannis's invitation to the consultations, arguing that it would give him, as a mediator between the state and society, a great opportunity to generate the consultation process. This would result in a reform agenda to be framed and negotiated with the social actors and political parties, what could turn into a schedule for reform undertaken by political institutions and political actors (since they would still be the ones who continued to handle politics in Parliament).

After the 2016 technocratic experiment, the traditional political parties returned in January 2017 – the same ones who had been blamed in 2015 for the lack of reforms and the generalized corruption that "kills". PSD returned in an *en fanfare* score – which suggests that a large number of Romanians prefer traditional and institutionalized parties to form the government (the rational choice is this: since they always want to get another term in Parliament, the traditional parties are expected to be accountable to their voters and probably will try to deliver what they promised during elections). Under these circumstances, the voters took a moderate risk voting for civic involvement, so the Save Romania Union turned into a political involvement through 8% of the parliamentary seats. So, the civic energy could not be catalyzed into a rigid political force, compared to that of traditional,

institutionalized parties (the experience also relevant for Ukraine). Instead, several political parties in opposition confront the majority political coalition by appealing to the "street", including the traditional National Liberal Party, which organized in June a failed protest in Victoriei Square, in which citizens did not participate.

Thus, it can be said that "the street" has been waiting for a change in the governmental action, a better connection between citizens and the executive branch, and more consultation and transparency on sensitive issues in society, such as the package of laws on justice. Instead, after one month, the new government faced massive protests against an emergency ordinance on justice laws, which was later repealed. Then, president Iohannis descended among protesters to express his support. "The street" was again reconfirmed as a powerful political actor.

Several polls among participants in the recent protests in Romania show that 7% of them participated in the protests of 2012, 16% took part in the 2013 protests and 37% in the 2015 protests caused by the *Collectiv* nightclub fire. Keeping in mind the increasing awareness of the effectiveness of this type of civic-political action in relation to political decision-makers, this is nothing but a rational choice. Thus, about 70% of those manifesting in the streets believe the protests are very effective. In this, an important ideological-identity constituent can be identified (68% said they were closer to the right on the political spectrum versus only 32% who said they were closer to the left), indicating a relative homogeneity coagulated around their perception of anti-corruption agenda and support of civic non-governmental organizations (whose activities are more of a watchdog type), European Union and international companies. The main causes identified by them for the shortcomings of the Romanian economy and society include economic interests, nepotism, "nouveaux riches" after 1989 and former members of the Communist Party and Communist state apparatus. In a word, corruption. The Save Romania Union (USR) and the former technocrat, Prime Minister Dacian Cioloș, stem from this arena. USR is a new, grassroots, political party at its first mandate in parliament – formed by people who did not have much to do with politics (at least offi-

cially). They try to utilize the ideas set forth by the street through projects, for which they look for support in the street rather than in parliament (for example, collecting signatures for a legislative initiative to prohibit the admission to public positions for individuals under criminal investigation), and through their refusal to be allied with the powers that be and, in general, with large, institutionalized parties. It is thus noticed as the reason why the opposition does not initiate collective actions, although each opposition party claims to represent those in the street. In addition, they fail to agree on which party will furnish the leader in case of a possible coalition: PNL, PMP, USR or Cioloș's movement. Cioloș plans to open the lists of the May 2019 European parliamentary elections of the group he is coordinating - the Romania Together Movement. So it seems that the opposition parties want to run separately in the next elections.

Politics and Justice

The Constitutional Court's decision on the latest conflict between powers - in the case of President Iohannis vs. the Government in which the President turned down the Minister of Justice's proposal to withdraw the Chief Prosecutor of the National Anticorruption Directorate, L.C. Kovesi - attenuated the role of president and indirectly strengthened parliamentarism. Romanian semi-presidentialism (a kind of disguised presidentialism, especially before 2003 but also *ex post* the Constitutional review in 2003) has so far been mitigated only in political practice by the solid parliamentary majorities, which maintained the government when it did not come from a political coalition favored by the president. By resolving this new dispute between the president and the government, the Constitutional Court delimited the shared jurisdiction between the executive authorities (president and government) on the dismissal of the head of the prosecutor's office attached to the National Anticorruption Directorate (*ipso facto*, this resolution will affect Romania's Attorney General's office as well, but if this is the case, the institutional actors will most probably meet again in front of the Constitutional Court). This was done by ordering President Klaus

Iohannis "to issue a decree on removing the Chief Prosecutor of the National Anticorruption Directorate, Ms. Laura Codruta Kövesi" at the request of the Minister of Justice, whom the Constitution authorizes to supervise the activities of prosecutors. However, a widespread legal opinion is that prosecutors under the "supervision of the Minister of Justice" does not mean that they are "subordinated" to him but just that he allocates the budget and resources for the functioning of the prosecutors' offices and courts, which is necessary for exercising justice as a public service. However, at the same time, it is the Minister of Justice who proposes persons for managers in the prosecutors' offices.

These days, the dismissal of the Chief Prosecutor of the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) has a huge stake and has strongly divided the public opinion in Romania. Regarding the dismissal decree, President Iohannis said that he had no intention of not complying with the Constitutional Court's decisions, which are mandatory. Many politicians have argued throughout this period, more or less explicitly, that the anti-corruption prosecutor's office has questioned such values as the presumption of innocence, citing considerable number of acquittals in court for politicians who were removed from the political arena after criminal investigations (however, not all of them were removed; for example, Liviu Dragnea has not quit the leading position at SDP and the Chamber of Deputies, even though he is a double convict, as he was found guilty in the first instance by the High Court of Cassation and Justice). It is interesting to note that both parties involved claim abuses of the rule of law. Whether it is prosecutors or politicians, who are now trying to modify the criminal code and reorganize the judicial system, both parties bring their own arguments.

At this point, after the removal of the DNA's chief, one can notice that many people fear that the anti-corruption fight will break off or slow down. This fear can be largely explained by the fact that, despite the formal rules that withdraw legitimacy from the constitution, the institutions generate more or less fragile equilibrium rather than the strict perfect rules, and for that reason, civically active citizens doubt

that policymakers will be guided only by the formal rules. In the backstage of the institutional environment, one may be intrigued by informal rules, interaction and negotiation among the personal interests of the politicians, political group leaders, or interest groups associated with the traditional parties.

Impeachment Decision Looms for Romanian President

The sequencing of two mandates of Băsescu as “a player-president” (as he titled himself despite the role of mediator the Constitution obliges him to perform) and the fluctuation in the legislature and the executive branch during this period shaped an informal type of presidentialism (despite the fact that had been attenuated by the constitutional revision of 2003), of which legitimacy stems from the votes won in elections and from the fact that the president is the head of state and therefore enjoys the highest authority. The “head of state” concept is related to the form of government, so here we can find the answer about who is empowered to exercise sovereignty in the state. In this particular case, the people are those who transfer by vote the legitimacy to the president (democracy). In Romania, the president’s authority is not symbolic. According to Article 80 of the Constitution, Romania’s president appears in a triple situation: the Head

of State; the Chief Executive; and the Guarantor of the Constitution and moderator between state powers. As the head of state, the President has the function of representing the Romanian state, both inside and outside Romania.

But at the same time, the president shares the popular legitimacy with the parliament. According to art. 61 (1) of the Constitution, Parliament is the supreme representative body of the Romanian people. He is called upon to represent the people. At the same time, being the head of state, the president symbolizes the state power and guides the interaction between parties and political actors, especially when the majority is fragile. Therefore, the presidential elections are a turning point for the subsequent configuration of the political scene and the formation of the government based on the dynamics of parliamentary coalitions and alliances.

In this context, the justice laws passed by the parliamentary majority and the controversial decision of the Constitutional Court on the President’s obligation to remove the DNA’s Chief Prosecutor at request of the Minister of Justice shifts the role and attributions of the President in favor of the Executive, which is supported by a comfortable parliamentary majority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the political scene in Bucharest, a new era of parliamentary semi-presidentialism is unfolding. The neighboring countries, which see in Romania a successful case of consolidated democracy ex post the communist period, should keep in mind that the constitutional issues shape and define current political events. Therefore, the recommendation based on the Romanian case would be that any potential constitutional review must be thoroughly discussed and carefully weighed so that the institutional processes would be predictable. If the moment is missed, then, without an independent Constitutional Court, the resolution of conflicts between state institutions will depend too much on politicians, who should be much more mature to handle the subtle complexities of a constitutional arrangement. But they frequently do not rise to this level of understanding, which is often needed in the post-communist countries.

Diplomatic relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova

Following tensions between Romania and the Republic of Moldova during the two mandates of communist President Vladimir Voronin, which culminated in the expulsion of several ambassadors and diplomats in spring 2009 against the background of protest movements and violence on April 7, diplomatic relations between Bucharest and Chișinău have entered a new stage. Moldovan communists failed in electing a president due to the lack of a vote. The internal political crisis mounted in Chișinău, while relations with Bucharest were defused. Snap elections created the opportunity to form a pro-European coalition, the Alliance for European Integration (AEI), wherein the main role was played by the Moldovan Liberal Democratic Party (MLDP), led by Prime Minister Vlad Filat. The Liberal Party (LP), led by Mihail Ghimpu, whose nephew Dorin Chirtoacă had been the mayor of Chișinău since 2007, was part of the coalition as well. Since 2009, LP had been collecting the votes of the unionist electorate, which it had received from Iurie Roșca, the leader of the Christian People's Democratic Party. The latter had been compromised through participation in the coalition led by the Communist Party (2005-2009). Part of the coalition was also the Moldovan Democratic Party (MDP), headed by Dumitru Diacov but financed and controlled by a mysterious individual, Vladimir Plahotniuc¹. The fourth party in the coalition was Our Moldova Alliance, led by Serafim Urechean. Only two of the four parties had solid connections with the political world in Bucharest. MDP, a member of the Socialist International, had previously collaborated with the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the descendant of the Communist Party in Romania, while Ghimpu's LP was a member of the European political group ALDE, together with the National Liberal Party (NLP), led by former Prime Minister Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, but

also close to unionist political groups from the entourage of Romanian President Traian Băsescu.

Romania was given the opportunity to completely reset its relations with the Republic of Moldova. The foreign context was favorable. The launch of the Eastern Partnership at the EU summit in Prague in May 2009 provided the European institutional framework through which Moldova could have reinvented itself. However, in Bucharest, the second half of 2009 was marked by a severe political crisis which downgraded the subject of Moldova on Romania's political agenda. By the end of 2009, Emil Boc's government saw Ambassador Teodor Baconschi as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The latter was posted in Paris at the time and had not dealt with Moldova previously. As such, he brought a new approach to the case: "Fortunately, a new approach is becoming imperative in Bucharest: at the insistent request of certain Western chancelleries, beginning with Berlin, which desires a reset of relations with the Russian Federation in view of pan-European reasons and energy security, our diplomacy took upon itself the creative effort to alter our offensive angle: we are no longer that annexationist state of the 1990s; we are a member of the EU that facilitates the dialogue between the EU and the Republic of Moldova on two levels: through activism, particularly through the framework offered by the Eastern Partnership, and by capitalizing on bilateral 'privileged relations.'"²

In the "Foreign Policy" chapter of Emil Boc's government program, voted in Parliament and published in the Official Journal of Romania, no. 907, December 23, 2009: "Romania will continue to support the European ambitions of the Republic of Moldova, as well as the latter's strategic objective to be integrated into the EU... Romania will insist that the European Union become more involved in the Republic of Moldova... The development of special relations with

¹ Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics. Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 372-420. The concept of 'patronage' is particularly useful in analyzing the evolution of politics in Moldova. Professor Hale, however, goes no further than 2012. Another noteworthy paradigm is proposed by Vladimir Gel'man in *Authoritarian Russia. Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015.

² Teodor Baconschi, *Legătura de chei. O mărturie diplomatică. Dialog cu Armand Goșu*, Curtea Veche, București, 2013, pp. 68-69

the Republic of Moldova will be founded on the European-oriented partnership, both politically and economically.” Energy and education were mentioned as priorities for collaboration. The Eastern Partnership, whose launch was initially viewed with envy in Bucharest because it cast a shadow on the Black Sea Synergy promoted by Romania, was re-evaluated. This was a significant change of rhetoric, which gradually took place following Romania’s joining of the EU on January 1, 2007. Practically speaking, the list of priorities sketched by Bucharest in fall 2009 was largely accomplished, from the agreement regarding frontier traffic to the opening of two additional Consulate Generals of Romania in Bălți and Cahul, and the inauguration of the Romanian Cultural Institute “Mihai Eminescu.”

Led by Victor Ponta, the Social Liberal Union government (SDP and NLP) continued and developed previous projects hailing from the mandate of Teodor Baconschi (December 2009 – January 2012). Several new projects were also added. The government program for 2013-2016 was more complex and paid additional attention to the Republic of Moldova. In the document, the latter was mentioned immediately following the Strategic Partnership with the USA. Supporting the European path, finalizing negotiations on the EU Association Agreement and the DCFTA, as well as the liberalization of the visa system were all central issues. Bilateral energy projects (the Iași-Ungheni gas line, the Fălcu-Gotești and Suceava-Bălți aerial energy lines, etc) were outlined. It is significant that SDP, which held the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through Titus Corlățean (2012-2014), did not return to the annexationist or revisionist rhetoric that it had previously practiced and that stirred so much irritation in Western chancelleries, but rather continued on the path set out by the Boc government, which tackled the subject of the Republic of Moldova within a European paradigm. Furthermore, during their two years of co-existence, President Traian Băsescu and the Victor Ponta government entertained a veritable competition for priority in Romania’s relations to

Chișinău, which was ably speculated by the Lurie Leancă government.

When Klaus Iohannis won the presidential elections in fall 2014, this paradoxically consolidated the control of SDP over relations with the Republic of Moldova. Aside from his visit to Chișinău in February 2015, when President Iohannis thanked the electorate who voted for him, the latter manifested no interest in the case of Moldova. The next two Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Bodgan Aurescu (2015) and Lazăr Comănescu (2016), fulfilled “transitional” roles and continued previous projects. It was exactly during these two years that the Republic of Moldova fell into a dramatic political, economic, social, and moral crisis, which transformed it into the “forerunner” of the Eastern Partnership and a “problem student,” rather similar to a failed state.

Between September 2009 and January 2013, when the scandal of the Princely Forest broke out³, authorities in Bucharest did not discriminate between interlocutors from Chișinău, collaborating, instead, with all important parties, MLDP, LP, and MDP, as well as their leaders, Prime Minister Vlad Filat, Mihai Ghimpu and Vladimir Plahotniuc, even though Filat politically subscribed to the European People’s Party, of which Romanian President Băsescu was also a member.

The Princely Forest scandal is a turning point in the recent history of Moldova. The battle for resources between Filat and Plahotniuc led to the accumulation of political tension within the coalition. Filat attempted to obtain a political advantage on account of the revelation of a murder committed during a hunting event and hidden from the public, a murder allegedly

³ On December 23, 2012, during a hunting event in the scientific reservation of the Princely Forest, attorney general Valeriu Zubco, a close friend of MDP leader Vlad Plahotniuc, seems to have shot and mortally wounded a young man. Plahotniuc allegedly attempted to cover up the case for fear of losing an important part of his mechanism of power, the attorney general, a function that MDP controlled through the foundation protocol of the Alliance for European Integration. In January 2013, a massive political scandal broke out, which led to the destitution by the Parliament of the attorney general and of the Parliament Vice President Plahotniuc, as well as the fall of the Vlad Filat government.

committed by the attorney general, a close friend of Plahotniuc. As such, Filat tried to hinder the political ambitions of the oligarch and to weaken his control over the justice system through the dismissal of the attorney general. Only that the latter was much too important for Plahotniuc to sacrifice. Thus, the coalition crumbled. Plahotniuc and, two months later, Marian Lupu were dismissed from their positions as vice-speaker and Parliament speaker, respectively (Lupu was also the interim president of the Republic). Filat was removed from the Prime Minister's office through a motion of no confidence, which was voted both by the Democrats and Voronin's communists. Political pressure from the West, and particularly from Bucharest, impelled Filat to give up the idea of snap elections, supported by Voronin, and return to negotiations with Plahotniuc and Ghimpu on a new Alliance for European Integration. Filat was forced to apologize to Plahotniuc for having called the latter a "puppet master." Nevertheless, in spite of this public humiliation, the Constitutional Court ruled that a person accused of corruption through a motion of no confidence voted by Parliament could no longer occupy the position of Prime Minister. The judiciary investigated whether there were any penal grounds for the political accusation. At the time, the Constitutional Court was being led by Alexandru Tănase, co-founder and former member of MLDP, who had become Filat's mortal enemy⁴. Tănase would remain an instrument in the hands of Plahotniuc for many years to come and he would never disappoint the latter through any decision of the Constitutional Court.

The manner in which Plahotniuc employed the justice system in the wake of the Princely Forest scandal in order to remove Filat from the race for the function of Prime Minister inaugurated an era of inconceivable abuses. These culminated in June 2018 with the invalidation of the Chişinău mayoral elections. The elections had been won by Andrei Năstase, a leader

of the anti-oligarchy opposition with which Plahotniuc obviously disagreed.

Most likely, the government in Bucharest interpreted this crisis from a partisan, political point of view (SDP and MDP were members of the socialist group). Ponta and Corlăţean commended the removal of Filat, whom they considered to be an ally of President Băsescu, their greatest political opponent. It would seem that removing Filat made it possible to strengthen the Romanian government's influence upon the foreign policy case of Bucharest-Chişinău, to the detriment of President Băsescu, against whom Ponta-Corlăţean were competing. Such an assumption is backed by at least two details. Although Romania could have leveraged its influence in Chişinău, it preferred not to do so. Instead, it assisted, most likely with amusement, the contortion of legislation carried out by the President of the Constitutional Court, Alexandru Tănase, a close member of certain circles in Bucharest⁵ and a personal enemy of Filat. Filat's successor, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Iurie Leancă, formed a very close relationship with Ponta, so much so that he attended the announcement of the latter's presidential candidacy in fall 2014 at the Bucharest National Arena, in spite of the fact that Leancă was part of a different European political group, namely the People's Party.

The Princely Forest scandal represented a turning point in the recent political history of the Republic of Moldova. The leader of MLDP, the most significant political party in Chişinău, was removed from the front stage in a controversial manner, whereas Ghimpu and Plahotniuc consolidated their positions. Both were close to Bucharest: the first, to NLP, the second, to SDP. Throughout 2013-2014, the latter two parties founded USL, a coalition which formed the govern-

⁴ Armand Goşu, *Anticorupție originală la Chişinău*, <https://revista22.ro/60046/anticorupție-original-la-chiinu.html> (Accessed on July 23, 2018).

⁵ Unionist journalist Constantin Tănase (1949-2014), the father of judge Al. Tănase had been editing the journal "Timpul" in Chişinău for many years. He led the journal while being partially financed by the Romanian government in Bucharest through various structures subordinated to the latter.

ing majority in Bucharest and benefitted from ample support in Parliament.

Nevertheless, the new Alliance for European Integration, established after the Parliamentary elections of November 2014, centered on Filat's party, because MLDP had obtained the largest number of votes and therefore the largest number of representatives compared to other pro-European parties⁶.

Several weeks after the elections, in early 2015, the "bomb" known as "the theft of the century" detonated. More specifically, it was "discovered" that 1 billion dollars had disappeared from three banks. This represented an enormous sum for Europe's poorest country⁷.

In Chişinău, a long series of protests and public gatherings began, bringing together tens of thousands of people. During the spring and summer, several marathon manifestations took place, and in the autumn, three distinct tent camps were put up by protesters in front of Parliament. The first camp belonged to protesters from the Square, organized by the Justice and Truth Platform, which would become a political party a few months later. The other two camps belonged to Igor Dodon's socialists and Our Party, led by controversial Renato Usatîi, respectively. Soon enough, the role of the latter two became obvious. They arguably were meant to compromise anti-oligarchy protests resulting from the theft of the billion dollars.

Foreign embassies, Western chancelleries, and high ranking statesmen all drew attention to the missteps in Moldova and repeatedly requested an investiga-

tion of the bank thefts. Romania, however, was dead silent. Prime Minister Ponta continued paying several visits to Romania per year, whereas Romanian-Moldovan projects seemed to carry on as planned. On his last visit to Chişinău, on August 26-27, 2015, Prime Minister Ponta headed straight to his meeting with Plahotniuc, to the dismay of his Moldovan counterpart. The latter was expecting Ponta, together with the guard of honor, in front of the government building of the Republic of Moldova.

Already in summer 2015, notable European officials, such as the Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union, spoke of Moldova as a captured state⁸. As a matter of fact, the phrase "captured state" was competing with that of "oligarchic regime" in public debate. The latter term was widely spread especially throughout the states of the former Soviet Union. The two concepts described a dramatic reality: "Parliamentary vote-buying, the sale of judicial decisions, mishandling of public funds and non-transparent party financing were frequent practices that highlighted the vulnerabilities of the democratic transition process in Moldova."⁹

Faced with protests of increasing intensity, the oligarchic regime in Chişinău responded by voting to lift Vlad Filat's parliamentary immunity (MDP voted with socialists and communists known for their pro-Russian views) and arresting him in Parliament on October 15.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, this step led to the fall of the government and to a severe political crisis which shook the stage in Chişinău. Plahotniuc's attempt to become the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldo-

⁶ Parliamentary Elections in Moldova on November 30, 2014, <http://www.e-democracy.md/en/elections/parliamentary/2014/> (Accessed on July 23, 2018).

⁷ Radiography Of A Bank Fraud In Moldova: From Money Laundering To Billion Fraud And State Debt, December 20, 2016, <https://www.transparency.md/2016/12/20/radiography-of-a-bank-fraud-in-moldova-from-money-laundering-to-billion-fraud-and-state-debt/> (Accessed on July 15, 2018). More useful details to be found in Luke Coffey, A Tangled Web of Corruption Is Strangling Moldova. Even American money is being stolen, August 29, 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/tangled-web-corruption-strangling-moldova-17518> (Accessed on July 23, 2018).

⁸ One of the first notable foreign statesmen who arrived at this conclusion was Thorbjørn Jagland, the Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/opinion/bring-moldova-back-from-the-brink.html> (Accessed on 15 iulie 2018).

⁹ Cristina Gherasimov, Moldova: The Captured State on Europe's Edge, 8 March 2017, https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/moldova-captured-state-europe-s-edge?utm_source=Chatham%20House&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=8080018_Publication%20Alert%20Cristina%20Gherasimov%20EC%2008032017&dm_i=1S3M,4T6KY,NUTBW-,I4QN,1# (Accessed on July 23, 2018).

¹⁰ Armand Goşu, Euro-falia. Turbulen   i involu ii  n fostul spa  iu sovietic, Curtea Veche, 2016, pp. 177-178

va was the highest point of this crisis. The attempt failed due to the mobilization of Western embassies in Chişinău, as well as due to a bizarre incident that suggested President Nicolae Timofti was being blackmailed by Plahotniuc himself.¹¹ The President later denied such allegations and claimed that he had been misunderstood. Nevertheless, Plahotniuc managed to put together a Parliamentary majority (more than 51 deputies out of the total of 101), despite the fact that, according to the elections of November 30, 2014, MDP had only 19 deputies, fewer than the three other political groups, socialists, liberal-democrats and communists.

Voting in Parliament for Pavel Filip, the MDP candidate for Prime Minister, as well as swearing him in at midnight, in Chişinău paralyzed by demonstrations of protest, were made possible by the effective support Plahotniuc received from Bucharest.

On January 14, 2016, Romania's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lazăr Comănescu, commenced a lobbying campaign for Plahotniuc, which targeted Victoria Nuland, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs.¹² The main idea advertised by Romanian diplomacy was that the West should support Plahotniuc in the name of stability. At the time, the two statesmen were both in Trakai, Lithuania, where they were taking part in an informal gathering on security measures.¹³ The same day in Bucharest, the new ambassador of the Republic of Moldova, Mihai Gribincea, was received at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he handed in the copy of the accreditation letter. On this occasion, the Romanian deputy

minister Radu Podgoreanu emphasized the unprecedented "complexity" of the situation in the Republic of Moldova and urged that "a new government ought to be formed in Chişinău as soon as possible in order to ensure the stability of the country."¹⁴

Victoria Nuland's visit to Bucharest on January 18 made it possible for Romanian diplomacy to continue lobbying for Plahotniuc. This time, Nuland's interlocutor was deputy minister Daniel Ioniţă, Romania's current ambassador to Chişinău. The following press release featured a neutral tone: "The two officials entertained an extensive exchange of perspectives on the events of Romania's Eastern vicinity. Priority was given to the situation of the Republic of Moldova, that of Ukraine, and relations with Russia."¹⁵ The idea of "stability" was not mentioned. Yet this is merely the official press release. In Bucharest media,¹⁶ commentators from the entourage of the MFA promoted the idea that the US and Romania supported "the political stability" of Chişinău, thereby validating a Plahotniuc government. This was also how Victoria Nuland's conversations with Romanian statesmen were received in Chişinău by pro-European, anti-oligarchic media.

When the streets of Chişinău were occupied by tens of thousands of people protesting against the manner in which the Filip government was invested, at night, disregarding all procedures, on the evening of January 20, 2016, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest issued a statement by means of which it firmly positioned itself on Plahotniuc's side: "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is closely following the events in Chişinău. We recommend that everyone maintain their calm and we urge all political representatives

¹¹ Ibidem, pp. 195-196, 199-200.

¹² I have come to this conclusion following several interviews I conducted during January-March 2016 with MFA diplomats in Bucharest, a Polish diplomat commissioned in Bucharest, as well as with two American diplomats from the US embassy in Chişinău. Their names shall remain anonymous for obvious reasons.

¹³ "Both parties expressed concern regarding the current situation, while concomitantly emphasizing how important it is for political representatives of the Republic of Moldova to acknowledge the necessity to act in order to maintain the European direction of the country, in accordance to the interests of its citizens." <http://www.mae.ro/node/35286> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

¹⁴ <http://www.mae.ro/node/35282> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

¹⁵ <http://www.mae.ro/node/35376> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

¹⁶ Among the most active in TV shows that guide the public opinion were Iulian Chifu, Director of the Centre for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning and Professor at the National School of Political Science and Public Administration, Faculty of Political Science, and Radu Magdin, Director of Smartlink Communications.

in the Republic of Moldova to behave responsibly so that the democratic process to invest the Pavel Filip government, a government which obtained the vote of trust of the legitimate Parliament in Chişinău, may be carried out.¹⁷

To neutral observers, Bucharest's attitude at the time was somewhat puzzling. First, the SDP government led by Ponta had fallen, making way for the former European Commissioner for Agriculture, Dacian Cioloş, whose experience in politics should have, at least theoretically, rendered him receptive to the opinions of Brussels regarding the events in Chişinău. On the contrary, this was not at all the case. Secondly, the Cioloş government not only assimilated diplomatic leaders, without even an attempt to refresh the area that had not yet seen the end of the transition from Ceauşescu to Romania as a member of the Euro-Atlantic world, but also copy-pasted political opinions on sensitive cases such as the country's relations with the Republic of Moldova. The lobbying for Plahotniuc's regime by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued, on January 29, with an extensive briefing for diplomatic missions of EU and NATO states accredited in Bucharest, which centered on political events in the Republic of Moldova. The briefing was held by deputy minister Daniel Ioniţă who, rather predictably, emphasized the importance of "maintaining stability in the Republic of Moldova."¹⁸ The pretext flaunted by Ioniţă in front of the ambassadors, namely that if Plahotniuc lost power, snap elections would be organized and won by pro-Russian Dodon, was contradicted by the later turn of events.

On March 4, 2016, through yet another controversial ruling, the Constitutional Court reinstated presidential elections in the Parliamentary Republic. During the second round on November 13, pro-Russian Dodon confronted pro-European Maia Sandu. Utterly contradicting the narrative in Bucharest, Plahotniuc

supported pro-Russian Dodon,¹⁹ and the latter won the elections. Daniel Ioniţă, who was meanwhile appointed the ambassador of Romania to Chişinău, issued no further statements and never explained the logic of Romanian diplomacy. It seems that the Russian threat was a concern only while Sandu and Năstase, the leaders of the extra-parliamentary opposition, organized protests. Conversely, when Plahotniuc helped pro-Russian Dodon to become the president, the Russian threat no longer existed.

The year 2016 saw the high point of diplomatic activism from Bucharest in relation with Chişinău. It was manifested in countless visits and encouragements. On January 26, Pavel Filip came to Bucharest and asked for the release of the 150 million euro loan promised by Romania. On April 5, undersecretary of state Răzvan Horaşiu Radu visited Chişinău in order to discuss "the complexity of the process to achieve legislative harmony with EU law."²⁰ On April 14, a Moldovan deputy minister of Foreign Affairs was received by Minister Comănescu and Deputy Minister Ioniţă. According to the MFA statement, the Romanian statesmen talked about the "positive evolution recorded during previous months in what concerns the advancement of reform." Comănescu assured the Moldovan statesman that "Romania will grant the necessary support for reform... [he] added that progress in this respect is directly relevant in order for

¹⁹ The media controlled by Plahotniuc unleashed, during the last weeks of the campaign, but also during the two rounds of voting, an aggressive fake-news campaign against Maia Sandu, who was accused of having the intention to allow 30.000 Syrians to emigrate to Moldova, of being a lesbian, of leading an immoral life, of being corrupt, etc. The chief TV channels involved in the campaign belong to Plahotniuc's media holding, and include Prime TV and news channel Publika TV. During the day of the election, local authorities controlled by MDP organized the movement of tens of busses in Transnistria, transporting citizens to polling stations from East of the Dniester where pro-Russian candidate, Igor Dodon, had a better standing in polls. Audio recordings of a close collaborator of Plahotniuc, Constantin Botnari, were also revealed. In them, the latter declared that in the electoral campaign of fall 2016, the enemies of MDP were Maia Sandu (who candidated against pro-Russian Dodon) and Andrei Năstase, and that Dodon was not competing against MDP. Exclusive audio: "Dodon nu ne este concurrent"; Indica iile lui Botnari, alias Borsetka, in timpul preziden ialelor din 2016, <http://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/026a2e5986fb-b8cc/live-cabinetul-din-umbra-audio-cu-botnari-dand-indicatii-celor-din-pd-sa-l-promoveze-pe-dodon-in-timpul-alegerilor-din-2016.html> (Accessed on July 24, 2018).

¹⁷ <http://www.mae.ro/node/35431> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

¹⁸ <http://www.mae.ro/node/35537> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

²⁰ <http://www.mae.ro/node/35537> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

Moldova to meet, in the upcoming time frame, the conditions necessary for the transfer of the first installment of the 150 million euro credit offered by Romania.²¹ One day later, in Bratislava, on the occasion of GLOBSEC, Comănescu met with Moldovan Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Galbur, whom he assured of the "strong support" Romania offered his country. In May, a three-day visit to Chişinău of the minister for Romanians Everywhere took place. Once again, the idea of "consolidating stability" in the Republic of Moldova was flaunted.²²

The pinnacle of lobbying for the Plahotniuc regime occurred in summer 2016, when Romanian Minister Comănescu, joined by French Secretary of State for European Affairs Harlem Desir, visited the Republic of Moldova. Comănescu and Desir were also co-presidents of the Group for European Action of the Republic of Moldova, which had been launched by former Minister Baconschi in January 2010. This Romanian-French tandem had stopped working for some time. However, following Cioloş's visit to Paris, where he was greeted by French Prime Minister Manuel Valls and where they signed the up-to-date roadmap for the Bilateral Strategic Partnership, the Group for European Action was resurrected in its initial format. The two Ministers, Comănescu and Desir, visited Chişinău on June 16-17. Upon their meeting with President Timofti and Prime Minister Filip, the message was the same: "the consolidation of stability." Even during their meeting with the leaders of pro-European opposition, Maia Sandu and Andrei Năstase, the message was a similar one: they emphasized "the importance of maintaining stability," as well as the fact that political debates regarding the fall presidential elections "ought to be limited to existing democratic frameworks, rather than affect on-going processes to re-launch reform and consolidate stability in the Republic of Moldova." In other words, it was suggest-

ed that the opposition in Chişinău should not inconvenience the Plahotniuc regime, as this would affect the stability of Moldova. The two Ministers then met with civil society experts, Igor Munteanu, Igor Boţan, Arcadie Barbăroşie etc. According to the official statement of MFA, Comănescu asked the latter to "maintain impartiality and rigor in their approach to issues of public debate."²³

The visit of Prime Minister Cioloş to Chişinău (August 23-25), followed by the payment of the first installment of the loan granted by Romania, just prior to the commencement of the electoral campaign, did not do much to help MDP's candidate, Marian Lupu. The latter's candidacy was withdrawn by Plahotniuc due to modest ratings which placed him somewhere in the middle of the list of candidates.

Surprisingly, when pro-Russian Igor Dodon won presidential elections with the support of Plahotniuc, this did not change Bucharest's attitude to the political regime in Chişinău, which continued to enjoy both the trust and the support of Romanian state authorities. Moreover, MDP had signed a collaboration agreement not only with United Russia, the party of President Vladimir Putin, but also with SDP, an important political party in Romania and a member of the Socialist International. The first collaboration agreement between SDP and MDP was signed in 2006 and has since been periodically renewed. During the latest signing ceremony, which took place at SDP headquarters in September 2014, Prime Minister Ponta, Minister of Foreign Affairs Corlăţean, and Liviu Dragnea, current president of SDP, were present.²⁴

The definitive victory of SDP in the December 2016 elections resulted in stylistic changes in Romania's approach to its relations with the Republic of Mol-

²¹ <http://www.mae.ro/node/36675> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

²² <http://www.mae.ro/node/36675> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

²³ <http://www.mae.ro/node/37515> (Accessed on Jul 19, 2018).

²⁴ http://www.realitatea.md/democratie-ii-moldoveni-i-social-democratie-ii-romani-se-vor-sus-line-reciproc-in-alegeri-ne-vor-facilita-accesul_8781.html ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kX8EXjTih3A> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

dova. The SDP governments, which followed during 2017-2018, reduced the frequency of contact but maintained an unaltered direction. Perhaps the best proof in this regard is represented by the three government programs, which have remained unchanged with concern to the chapter dedicated to the Republic of Moldova. Despite borrowing much from the Ponta government program, the current Prime Minister lacked enthusiasm. In only two years, between August 2013 and August 2015, Ponta had visited the Republic of Moldova eight times, thereby establishing a record which would be difficult, if not impossible, to equal. Instead of four visits per year, his successors paid a single visit to Chişinău and received their Moldovan counterpart to Bucharest only once per year.

The consolidation of the political status quo in Moldova, as well as that of the position of the Filip government in Chişinău, was further reflected in the communication agenda of Romanian statesmen. The "consolidation of stability" disappeared and its place was taken by more concrete conversations on energy and transport interconnectedness, but also on the participation of Romanian companies in the privatization in Moldova.²⁵ However, due to the political instability in Bucharest and the inability of SDP governments to implement their decisions, the projects did not advance at all. Chişinău was mostly interested in the loan granted by Romania and not in the progress of these projects.

Given that 2018 is celebrated throughout Romania as the Centenary of Greater Romania, the union of Bessarabia with the Kingdom of Romania provided an opportunity to test the relations between Bucharest and Chişinău, as well as the manner in which Moldovans responded to the preferences of the Romanian government.

On March 27 (old calendar, April 9 according to the Gregorian style), the 100th anniversary of Bessara-

bia's union with Romania, the Romanian Parliament met in solemn session, passing a "Declaration Celebrating the Union between Bessarabia and Romania." The document²⁶ affirms as "entirely legitimate" the wish for the "unification of the two states," and provides assurances that "Romania and its citizens are, and always will be, prepared to welcome any organic manifestation for reunification on the part of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova." The document does not explain in which way the unionists in the Republic of Moldova would be supported by Bucharest, leaving the issue open to any speculation.

The solemn session was also attended by a delegation from the Parliament in Chişinău, led by its speaker, Andrian Candu. Surprisingly, however, President Klaus Iohannis was absent, and chose to send a message about the need to "deepen the strategic partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, as well as Romania's commitment to support Chişinău's bid to join the EU." This message was in a stark contrast to the speeches held by the speakers of the two chambers of Parliament, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu and Liviu Dragnea. The latter invoked the Helsinki Final Act as an argument in favor of the union and called on the attendees to be bolder in carrying out the union between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Dragnea, the chair of the Social Democratic Party, the government's main party, was in favor of the union with the Republic of Moldova: "Romania was stronger when it was united. And it will be united. And it will be strong. This is our ideal."

These symbolic gestures were followed by no concrete action. As a matter of fact, the entire political agenda, not only in terms of internal policy but also in regard to external affairs, was cannibalized by the battle for control of the Judiciary and by the desperate attempt of certain notable political leaders, espe-

²⁵ <http://www.mae.ro/node/42698> (Accessed on July 19, 2018).

²⁶ Declaration for the Anniversary of the Joining of Bessarabia with the Motherland, 27 March 1918, http://www.cdep.ro/pdfs/oz/20180327_declaratie.pdf (Accessed on July 24, 2018).

cially Liviu Dragnea, to escape prison sentences that seemed to follow them like their own shadows. Fall 2018 will be decisive in this respect.

The battle for control of the Judiciary, which made the agenda of the government and of the Parliamentary majority, covered yet another, the older conflict between the government and the presidential office over control of foreign policy, and particularly of the perpetually sensitive Moldova case.

From Chişinău's Twitter Revolution in spring 2009 and up to this day, the Romanian President and Minister of Foreign Affairs formed a team and shared the same political affinity for only two years, between December 2009 and January 2012. During this time, the case file for the Republic of Moldova was with MFA. Although some roadblocks existed in the system, either at Cotroceni or on Aleea Modrogan, the relationship between Băsescu and Baconschi ensured the coherence of the Eastern policy, first and foremost in terms of the Bucharest-Chişinău bilateral relation. Once Titus Corlăţean took office in Foreign Affairs, the situation changed. A tough rivalry for control over the bilateral relation with Moldova commenced between President Băsescu and the Ponta government. The personal involvement of Ponta, but

also the determination with which he unfroze many of the projects that had made the subject of talks but had been dormant for years, made it so that, in 2014, the Ponta government shaded President Băsescu, whose concerns were limited to security, in an extremely tense regional context following the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the destabilization of Donbass. This Russian threat-dominated regional context, together with the lack of other institutional tools, pushed Băsescu to make increasing use of secret services, which he controlled through the Supreme Council of National Defense (CSAT), as instruments of foreign affairs. The victory of Klaus Iohannis in the elections and the weakened position of Ponta, who remained Prime Minister for another year, further oriented secret services towards foreign policy. Surprisingly, President Iohannis, a man obsessed with showing no resemblance to his predecessor Băsescu, who paid close attention to relations with Chişinău, manifested no interest whatsoever in the case of the Republic of Moldova. This context favored the secret services, which strengthened and autonomized their control. For the time being, Romania continues to depend on Plahotniuc in what concerns its foreign policy to the Republic of Moldova. It shows no signs that it intends to treat this addiction.

Reunification scenario political forces and civil society actors in Romania and the Republic of Moldova that promote the reunification. How realistic is the reunification scenario?

The Reunification and the Public Agenda in Romania and the Republic of Moldova

The reunification was the subject of political debates in Romania in the early 1990s. Subsequently, the subject appeared only sporadically in the context of an anniversary or the commemoration of historical events or in sporadic statements of nationalists (present in a limited number in all parliamentary parties). Throughout this period, the NATO admission and EU integration were the main foreign policy objectives consistently assumed by all parliamentary parties. After 2013, Traian Băsescu, the then President of Romania, promoted the idea that *the next political project for Romania, after NATO and the EU, is the union with Moldova*²⁷. The idea was then transposed into the electoral program of the People's Movement Party, on behalf of which Traian Băsescu obtained a senator mandate in the elections in 2016.

In the Republic of Moldova, the reunification has been brought to public attention throughout the period after 1991, both in electoral campaigns (for any kind of elections) and arguably to distract the attention from the actual problems of the society (poverty and endemic corruption). These engendered disputes, related to the geopolitical orientation of the Republic of Moldova, were used by Moscow's mass-media propaganda and by local political actors. In fact, both the pro-Russians and the unionists* have been in a constant "dialogue", each of them trying to become a "hero" whose goal was to save the Republic of Moldova from the danger posed by the adversary. Unionists on the two banks of the Prut River were both in partnership and in animosity relationships because of the suspicion that those in the Republic of Moldova might be spies of the Russian secret services and also because of the competition among various unionist groups in Chisinau for accessing funds coming from Romania. Occasionally, the unionists in Romania interacted with the pro-Russians from Chisinau, especially when those in the Republic of Moldova sent statements referring

to the "Moldovan identity" of most of its citizens or to "Romania's annexation intentions."

Actors Promoting the Reunification

The Republic of Moldova

In the Republic of Moldova, the reunification movement started to coagulate in the late 1980s amid the events that preceded the collapse of the USSR. This had as its first political emanation the Popular Front created around the pro-Romanian intelligentsia. After a short period of government, the Popular Front split in 1993, when most intellectuals left the political life. The Democratic People's Party (DPP) and its leader Iurie Roșca took over the flag of reunification. Until 2005, when Iurie Roșca made a public pact with the pro-Russian communists, DPP was the pro-reunification and pro-European party. DPP was openly supported from Bucharest. After 2005, the reunification was politically represented by the Liberal Party (LP) and its leaders Dorin Chirtoacă (mayor of Chisinau) and Mihai Ghimpu (member of parliament). The score obtained by the LP in the parliamentary elections was of approx. 10%. The two discredited themselves in front of their electorate through corruption business²⁸. Nowadays, the reunification is promoted by the National Unity Party (NUP). The party has built its fame benefiting from the help of Traian Băsescu, who is the party's "honorable president."

The unionists in the Republic of Moldova can be divided into two categories: sincere unionists and false unionists. The sincere unionists are those who are attached to the cause of reunification by conviction. Currently, they are not represented politically. Their electoral choices arguably go to the extra-parliamentary pro-European opposition (PPDA and PAS).

The false unionists are those who promote Moscow's interests and those who play local political games. For example, Iurie Roșca, the former leader of the

²⁷ *supporters of reunification. Poll, IRES: Trei sferturi dintre romani se declara de acord cu unirea Romaniei cu Republica Moldova, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-16104519-sondaj-ires-trei-sferturi-dintre-romani-declara-acord-unirea-romaniei-republica-moldova.htm>, accessed on 7.7.2018

²⁸ Tranzacția Chirtoacă-Gamrețki și mărturiile din „dosarul parcarilor”, <https://www.zdg.md/editia-print/investigatii/tranzactia-chirtoaca-gamretki-si-marturiile-din-dosarul-parcarilor>, accessed 27.7.2018.

most important unionist party after 1991, promotes Alexander Dugin's ideas on the reunification of Moldova with Romania under the "spiritual influence" of Russia. Roșca is also the coordinator of the Russian propaganda portal sputnik.md.²⁹ The pro-unification discourse is also promoted by political actors in the Republic of Moldova in order to reach power without materializing in clear proceedings for achieving the reunification. The same narratives are also used to divide the electorate of the pro-European opposition. This opposition represents a redoubtable counter-candidate for the pro-Russians around President Igor Dodon and for the government involved in rampant corruption activities.

Romania

In Romania, the unionists can be divided into several categories:

1) False unionists - especially politicians who support the cause of union for opportunistic reasons - in order to reach power, but without making subsequent efforts to achieve the reunification.

2) Sincere unionists - people (generally intellectuals) who are attached to the cause as a result of their convictions. This category also includes those who promote the cause of union through a nationalist discourse. In the parliamentary elections that took place in 2016, the reunification was found in the electoral program of the People's Movement Party (PMP), led by Traian Băsescu. The document mentions that *the People's Movement Party is the only party that has undertaken as country's objective the Reunification of Romania with the Republic of Moldova. In this respect, we propose the establishment of a Ministry of Reunification, following the example of Germany, under the conditions of the Helsinki Final Act. The capitalization of this national project has the role of strengthening Romania, which will thus benefit in terms of population and territory...*³⁰

²⁹ https://sputnik.md/authors/iurie_rosca/, accessed 27.7.2018.

³⁰ Program politic Partidul Mișcarea Populară, 2016, https://pmponline.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Program-Electoral_interactiv_web.pdf, accessed on 8.7.2018.

After completing two presidential mandates and in the context of a massive drop in popularity, Traian Băsescu relaunched his political career through a nationalist speech that included the topic of reunification as well. The purpose was to get votes from the electorate in the Republic of Moldova who had Romanian citizenship. Traian Băsescu became the most popular Romanian politician in the Republic of Moldova because during his presidential mandates he supported the increase of the number of scholarships granted by the Romanian state to Moldovan students and the simplification of the procedures for obtaining the Romanian citizenship for all Moldovan citizens whose predecessors were deprived of Romanian citizenship during the Soviet period. Following the elections in 2016, PMP obtained 18 deputy mandates and 8 senator mandates.³¹

All other parties that entered the parliament after the elections in 2016 announced only the support for Republic of Moldova's European integration. But in all parties, there are MPs who support projects that promote the reunification proposed by actors in the civil society. At the same time, in all parties, there are nationalist voices that occasionally make statements about the need of achieving the reunification. The theme of reunification is also opportunistically used by politicians especially in connection with an alleged "Russian danger" threatening Romania and its interests. The "Russian danger" is constantly brought to public debates in order to divert attention from the problems of the Romanian society (for example, attempts of political parties to oppose the anti-corruption fight). The theme of reunification also appears in political speeches as a result of politicians' desire to prove their "patriotism" to the electorate. The most eloquent example in this respect is the statement made by social democrat leader Liviu Dragnea during a special parliamentary debate dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the unification of Bessarabia with the Kingdom of Romania: *I say it in an open, simple and explicit way: I want the reunification with Moldova! I want Moldova and Romania in Europe, but as a single nation.*³²

³¹ Rezultate finale. PSD - 221 de mandate, PNL - 99 de mandate, 15.12.2016, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/alegeri-parlamentare-2016/rezultate-finale-psd-221-de-mandate-pnl-99-de-mandate-632969>, accessed on 8.7.2018.

³² Mesaje diferite de Centenar de la București și Chișinău. Dragnea: Eu vreau

Romania's relationship with the Republic of Moldova is managed by two groups of political and civic actors.³³ There is a group of politicians, declared unionists, who are associated with the former president Traian Băsescu and PMP. The second group is made up of representatives of the Alliance of Liberals (AL) and Social Democrats (SD) parties in the Romanian parliament and in the European Parliament. The first group openly supports the reunification as a political option, whereas the second group supports the European integration of the Republic of Moldova and only occasionally announces its reunification intentions.

The unionists around Traian Băsescu had as political partners in the Republic of Moldova the pro-unification Party of Liberals (LP). The ALDE-SP group has as a partner in the Republic of Moldova the Democratic Party (DP). The two parties in the Republic of Moldova compromised themselves through their alliance with oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc and through their corruption practices. Occasionally, these political groups assist each other. DP tried to buy the votes of Moldovans for SD candidate Victor Ponta at presidential elections in Romania.³⁴ Constantin Codreanu, PMP deputy in the Romanian parliament, ran for election to Chişinău City Hall. Although he did not have real chances, Codreanu was introduced in the electoral race in order to divide the pro-unification electorate and prevent Andrei Năstase, the candidate of the extra-parliamentary pro-European and anti-oligarchic opposition, from entering the second round of the elections. At the same time, the SD-ALDE-controlled government in Bucharest took no stance on the in-

validation of the elections to Chişinău City Hall, which had been won by Andrei Năstase. Moreover, a few months ago, SD Prime Minister Mihai Tudose congratulated the government in Chişinău for its decision to modify the electoral system in the Republic of Moldova.³⁵ The electoral system was changed despite the criticism of the Venice Commission and the fact that the invalidation of the elections was criticized by the EU, whereas the European Parliament adopted a resolution recommending that the EU financial support of the Republic of Moldova would be suspended.³⁶

Civil Society and the Reunification Cause

Lined up with the above-mentioned political groups, there are civic activists who support the reunification cause, especially those from the Action 2012 (founded in Romania) and the National Unity Bloc (BUN, registered in the Republic of Moldova). The civil society in Romania that supports the reunification cause has been infinitely grouped and regrouped in short-lived councils, alliances, and associations. Their transience is explained by several factors: the conflicts between false unionists and sincere unionists and the competition for limited financing sources. After 1990, the Romanian government through grant competitions financed events and mass media outlets (newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations). In addition to presenting the social-political reality in the Republic of Moldova and the Romanian vision of its history, those actors promoted the reunification as well. Except for a few publications (The Romanian Language Magazine, Contrafort, Timpul) and the Summer School at Izvorul Mureş, most initiatives had an ephemeral existence because the grant awarding policies were not constant.

Currently, there are associations of veteran unionists

unirea! Candu: Moldovenii își doresc un stat independent, dar sunt tendințe, money.ro, 27.3.2018, <https://www.money.ro/mesaje-diferite-de-centenar-de-la-bucuresti-si-chisinau-dragnea-eu-vreau-unirea-candu-moldovenii-isi-doresc-un-stat-independent-dar-sunt-tendinte/>, accessed on 10.7.2018.

³³ Armand Goșu, ANALIZĂ Invalidarea mandatului de primar al lui Andrei Năstase, inamicul no. 1 al lui Plahotniuc, ar putea arunca în aer regimul oligarhic de la Chişinău, contributors.ro, 29.06.2018, <http://www.contributors.ro/global-europa/analiza-invalidarea-mandatului-de-primar-al-lui-andrei-nastase-inamicul-no-1-al-lui-plahotniuc-ar-putea-aranca-in-aer-regimul-oligarhic-de-la-chi%88%99inau/>, accessed on 10.7.2018.

³⁴ Cum funcționa rețeaua lui Sebastian Ghiță de corupere a alegătorilor din Republica Moldova, 8.6.2017, https://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/cum-functiona-reteaua-sebastian-ghita-corupere-alegatorilor-republica-moldova-1_59381f535ab6550cb8e4613f/index.html, accessed on 9.7.2018. Cum a câștigat Ponta în Republica Moldova?, revista 22, 5.11.2014, <https://revista22.ro/49681/cum-a-ctigat-ponta-n-republica-moldova.html>, accessed on 9.7.2018.

³⁵ Noul sistem de vot din R. Moldova, criticat de UE, lăudat de Tudose, 21.07.2017, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/noul-sistem-de-vot-din-r-moldova-criticat-de-ue-laudat-de-tudose-765119>, accessed on 9.7.2018.

³⁶ Rezoluția Parlamentului European referitoare la criza politică din Moldova ca urmare a invalidării alegerilor locale de la Chişinău, 5.7.2018, <https://www.anticoruptie.md/ro/stiri/rezolutia-parlamentului-european-referitoare-la-crisa-politica-din-moldova-ca-urmare-a-invalidarii-alegerilor-locale-de-la-chisinau>, accessed on 9.7.2018.

in Romania that bring together people who have promoted the reunification cause since the early 1990s and civic groups that emerged after 2012. The veteran unionists are grouped in a lot of organizations and most of them are not present online. The most well-known organizations of veterans are the National Foundation for the Romanians Abroad (The Foundation) and the Reunification Council (RC). The Foundation, registered in Bucharest, also has "offices" in the Republic of Moldova. The Reunification Council (RC) was founded in Bucharest and a similar structure was created in the Republic of Moldova. The young unionists are grouped in the Action 2012. It also has a partner in the Republic of Moldova, the National Unity Bloc, which describes itself as *a coalition made up of over 20 non-governmental organizations and initiative groups pleading for the peaceful Reunification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania*.³⁷

The Foundation's activities included organizing summer schools, debates and artistic shows for promoting the culture and the history of Romania.

The Action 2012 organized pro-reunification marches, commemorations, and debates, as well as popularized the reunification cause in educational and cultural institutions in the Republic of Moldova and Romania. In 2017, the Action was one of the 100 organizations that created the Alliance for the Centenary, which aimed at *organizing and performing a series of cultural, commemorative or citizen events and actions dedicated to the Great Union. It also had as a strategic goal formulating, promoting and achieving the ideal of national reunification*.³⁸ In 2018, the Action initiated a signature-gathering proceeding in order to amend the Constitution of Romania so as to include a preamble referring to the *peaceful, freely-consented reunification of the Romanian nation, without any interference from outside*.³⁹ By July 2018, they gathered 45,000 signatures out of required 1 million.

³⁷ Blocul Unității Naționale condamnă faptul că nu a fost acceptat la Forumul Public, Adevărul, 14.10.2015., https://adevarul.ro/moldova/actualitate/blocul-unitatii-nationale-condamna-faptul-nu-fost-acceptat-forumul-public-1_561e58a6f5eaafab2ca67e2b/index.html, accessed on 10.7.2018.

³⁸ Alianța pentru Centenar, lansată la București: „2018 este despre Basarabia”, InfoPrut, 20.7.2017, <http://infoprut.ro/47975-alianța-pentru-centenar-lansată-la-bucurești-2018-este-despre-basarabia.html>

³⁹ <https://www.semnez.eu/>, accessed on 10.7.2018.

According to the information published on its site, the Foundation benefited from funds granted by the Government of Romania.⁴⁰ The site of the Action mentions that it is supported by voluntary activities, individual donations and by the sale of objects bearing symbols of the union.⁴¹ The Government of Romania through a grant program funds projects of the Action 2012, such as the creation of the Unirea⁴² (10) TV channel. At the same time, the Action leaders take part in events (debates, summer schools) that promote the reunification and are financed by the Romanian government (through the Ministry for Romanians Abroad and the Romanian Cultural Institute).

The Population of the Two States and the Reunification

Romania

Very few surveys carried out in Romania asked questions about a possible reunification of the two states. A direct question regarding a possible agreement was asked in a survey in 2013. According to it, 76% of Romanians agree with the reunification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania.⁴³ According to the latest survey (2016), 39.7% of the population believe that the reunification would bring more benefits to Romania, whereas 28.5% say the opposite.⁴⁴ Although there is no anti-unionist opinion trend in Romania, some people there are more skeptical. They oppose the reunification project either because they have preconceived ideas about the Republic of Moldova or for economic reasons. The Republic of Moldova is seen as a Russian space, a state having a low chance of escaping from Russia's influence and of integrating into the EU. Mol-

⁴⁰ FNRP proiecte, <http://www.romanii.ro/proiecte-fnrp/76-proiecte-fnrp>, accessed on 9.7.2018.

⁴¹ <http://actiunea2012.ro/cunoa%C8%99te-%C8%9Bi-%C8%9Bara>, accessed on 10.7.2018.

⁴² *in Romanian language "unire" means "union".

⁴³ Sondaj IRES: Trei sferturi dintre romani se declara de acord cu unirea Romaniei cu Republica Moldova, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-16104519-sondaj-ires-trei-sferturi-dintre-romani-declara-acord-unirea-romaniei-republica-moldova.htm>, accessed on 7.7.2018

⁴⁴ Aprilie 2016, Republica Moldova. Aderarea României la UE., <https://www.inscop.ro/aprilie-2016-republica-moldova-aderarea-romaniei-la-ue/>, accessed on 7.7.2018.

dova is the poorest state in Europe,⁴⁵ its GDP being as much as that of a county in Romania.⁴⁶ The skepticism towards the reunification is also fueled by the fear that Romania would have to absorb the Russian-speaking minorities or citizens of the Republic of Moldova having pro-Russian political options.

In addition, very few citizens of Romania have visited Moldova after 1991. Moldova is a destination almost absent in the offer of the travel agencies. The general public in Romania has limited knowledge about the Republic of Moldova and most information is historical. Therefore, it is easily manipulated by the political and civic actors presenting and analyzing the events in the Republic of Moldova almost exclusively from the perspective of the disputes between the pro-Romanians (Europeans) and the pro-Russians and of the negative influence of Russia. The Republic of Moldova is almost absent from the news and mass-media talk-shows in Romania. The press's interest in the Republic of Moldova occurs in the context of "big events," such as elections. Those events are interpreted exclusively from the perspective of "geopolitical disputes". Other issues such as the failure of pro-European reforms or the endemic corruption are absent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ukrainian decision-makers who are involved in the process of foreign policy-making must take into account the fact that the reunification of Romania with the Republic of Moldova is more a symbolic project with a low chance of being implemented. This desideration is supported both by persons attached to the cause by conviction and by politicians or civic activists having electoral or material interests. The reunification does not represent an objective of Romania's foreign policy.

Romania-Ukraine relations must be built based on Romania's EU membership and the support it can give Ukraine in the implementation of the Association Agreement.

The Republic of Moldova

By 2015, a single opinion survey questioned the opinion of the citizens in the Republic of Moldova about the existence of an independent state of the Republic of Moldova. According to the data made public by the authorities, 75% of Moldovans participated in the consultation and 94.5% responded YES.⁴⁷ Before 2015, when the first surveys directly asked about a possible reunification, it was considered that the support for it is about 10% (the result obtained in the election by the main party having pro-reunification speech).

In 2015, the question about the unification of the two states was addressed directly. The support for such a project was about 22%.⁴⁸ The situation is explained by the disappointment of the population over the opportunism of the pro-reunification political actors and by the attraction represented by the reforms implemented in Romania after the admission to the EU (especially in the field of justice). Romania's attractiveness for the citizens in the Republic of Moldova also increased in the context of the failure of the pro-European reforms and the corrupt practices of the false pro-European governance. At the same time, 33% of the citizens in the Republic of Moldova would support a possible union with Russia.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Analiză socio-economică. Cum arată Republica Moldova la 100 de ani de la unirea cu România., <http://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/analiza-socio-economica-cum-arata-republica-moldova-la-100-de-ani-de-la-unirea-cu-romania/>, accessed on 7.7.2018

⁴⁶ PIB-ul din Prahova este cât cel al Republicii Moldova, la un număr de locuitori de 3 ori mai mic., <http://www.zf.ro/zf-24/pib-ul-din-prahova-este-cat-cel-al-republicii-moldova-la-un-numar-de-locuitori-de-3-ori-mai-mic-16131941>, accessed on 7.7.2018.

⁴⁷ Un referendum contestat - „La sfat cu poporul”, *Timpul*, 6.3.2012, <https://www.timpul.md/articol/un-referendum-contestat---la-sfat-cu-poporul-32060.html>, accessed on 8.7.2018.

⁴⁸ Barometrul de opinie publică, Institutul pentru Politici Publice, 2017, <http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Rezultate-sondaj.-Partea-1.pdf>, accessed on 8.7.2018.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

Best practices that Romania can share with Moldova and Ukraine

A comprehensive analysis of the strategic partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova can create prerequisites for identifying good practices that can be transferred to the bilateral relationship between Bucharest and Kyiv. In this respect, we have to consider the fact that Romania's interests and resources for the Republic of Moldova⁵⁰ and Ukraine⁵¹ are different. Therefore, this section has the following two objectives:

- 1) Identify the objectives and best practices of Romania's foreign policy in relations with the Republic of Moldova;
- 2) Formulate recommendations for Romania's foreign policy in relation with Ukraine, starting from examples of good practices built on the Romania-Moldova partnership.

Romania's foreign policy objectives in relation to the Republic of Moldova are as follows:

A. Support the European aspirations of the Republic of Moldova. This is based on the Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova for European Integration of the Republic of Moldova (2010) and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Declaration (2012). For the same purpose, there were established the Romanian-Moldovan Intergovernmental Commission for European Integration and the Joint Commission for European Integration between the Parliament of Romania and the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. The official meetings of the two committees are relatively rare. At the legislative level, there is also the friendship group with Romania,⁵² which includes 33 Moldovan MPs. Also, a similar group

exists in the Parliament of Romania for Ukraine,⁵³ the Parliamentary Friendship Group with Ukraine. The activities of these working groups, especially those with Ukraine, are not effective. Their members are not sufficiently active and take little action to contribute to mutual knowledge. In September 2017, the Moldovan-EU friendship group⁵⁴ was created in the European Parliament at the initiative of Romanian MEP Norica Nicolai. The aim of this initiative is to strengthen the forces that promote the Republic of Moldova's accession to the European Union, as well as to organize concrete activities to increase the visibility of this state in different European institutions.

In its relationship with Kyiv, Bucharest has defined its foreign policy interest as maintaining it on the path of achieving European goals as an essential element for strengthening regional stability. After Crimea annexation by the Russian Federation, this interest was complemented by Romania's official position of supporting Ukraine in its efforts to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity and to recognize the annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation. In addition, the Romanian Parliament ratified the Association Agreements and the DCFTA with the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine at the same time.

Romania is also appreciated by the Moldovan and Ukrainian civil society as an example of good practice in the fight against corruption (one of the central elements of the dialogue with the EU on European integration). In the Ukrainian media and civil society, there is a growing interest in everything that the "*Romanian model to fight against institutional corruption*" means.⁵⁵ There is also an increased effort to convince

⁵⁰ Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Vecinătatea de interes a României ca stat membru UE, Republica Moldova, <https://www.mae.ro/node/1421>

⁵¹ Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Vecinătatea de interes a României ca stat membru UE: Ucraina, <https://www.mae.ro/node/1474>

⁵² Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. Grupul de prietenie cu România, Chişinău, <http://www.parlament.md/Diploma%C5%A3ieparlamentar%C4%83/Grupurideprietenie/tabid/158/Id/29/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx>

⁵³ Romania, The Chamber of Deputies. Grupul parlamentar de prietenie cu Ucraina, Bucureşti, <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura2015.pr?idg=77&leg=2016>

⁵⁴ Moldova.org, Un grup de prietenie Moldova-UE a fost creat în Parlamentul European, Chişinău, 15 septembrie 2017, <http://www.moldova.org/un-grup-de-prietenie-moldova-ue-fost-creat-parlamentul-european/>

⁵⁵ Gerasymchuk, Sergiy, Стресс-тест для Румынии: какие последствия будет иметь отставка легендарного борца с коррупцией, Eurointegration.com.ua, Kyiv, 10 iulie 2018, <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/articles/2018/07/10/7084197/>

the responsible institutions as well as international donors to support the development of Ukrainian investigative journalism and anti-corruption experts through special programs that would explain Romania's progress in this respect. Previously, Romanian anti-corruption experts have been involved in civil society programs in the Republic of Moldova. Due to this fact, the knowledge about *"the phenomenon of the anti-corruption fight in Romania"* in Chisinau is quite high, and now it is also possible in Kyiv. The trilateral interactions between experts from Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine streamline the process of regional information distribution.

However, in order to deepen the political and economic dialogue, certain guarantees are needed for future investments: the guarantee of the right to private property, a functional tax system, and effective laws to facilitate the development of the business environment. All of these are in its early stages in Ukraine. It should also be mentioned that Moldova is easier to approach due to its dimensions, but also because the interaction has been more intense in the past. For comparison, we can talk about an advance of Chisinau in this respect, because there is a legal basis in line with international requirements. At the same time, citizens in this state cannot enjoy these opportunities because there are no tools to enforce the legal framework. In Kyiv, institutional reforms and anti-corruption policies are even slower. Romania needs predictable and stable economic partnerships to advance larger regional economic initiatives with Ukraine.

Romania is the main destination for many products originating in the Republic of Moldova. This is confirmed by official statistics. In the first quarter of 2018, one-third of Moldovan exports to the European Union are destined for Romania – 283,716.14 (thousands USD). This represents about 25% of its total exports.⁵⁶ There are several collaborative initiatives

among public institutions, ministries, and public agencies partially or totally funded through RoAid or other available sources for European integration projects.

However, the most difficult decision in the framework of the cooperation referred to the Agreement between the Government of Romania and the Government of the Republic of Moldova on the implementation of the technical and financial assistance program, which involved 100 million euros of non-reimbursable financial aid granted by Romania to the Republic of Moldova. The purpose of the financial assistance was clear: to eliminate the effects of the floods in the Republic of Moldova (2010), to support the works at the Iasi-Ungheni gas pipeline - that part of the project that had to be implemented on the territory of the Republic of Moldova (2013-2014) and rehabilitation of educational infrastructure in the Republic of Moldova. Although the agreement was aimed at achieving pragmatic, technical objectives, the evolution of the political crisis in Chisinau (caused by the embezzlement of more than one billion euros from the banking system of the Republic of Moldova and the Russian "Laundromat") and the slowing of the reforms in certain areas, forced Bucharest to impose conditions for Chisinau.⁵⁷

B. Support the Republic of Moldova's efforts to gain energy independence (for electricity and natural gas supplies). The objective was to complete the Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline in order to diminish the dependence on the energy resources from the Russian Federation. Experts differ in their assessment of the project implementation. But all sides have recognized that Gazprom's domestic and foreign policy factor has sufficiently influenced its technical aspect.⁵⁸ Recent-

⁵⁶ National Statistic Bureau of the Republic of Moldova. Comerțul exterior, ianuarie - martie 2018, <http://www.statistica.md/category.php?l=ro&idc=336&>

⁵⁷ Ziare.com. Ciolos: Vom acorda al doilea imprumut Moldovei dupa o decizie a FMI, București, 25 august 2016, <http://www.ziare.com/dacian-ciolos/premier/ciolos-vom-acorda-al-doilea-imprumut-moldovei-dupa-o-decizie-a-fmi-1433947>

⁵⁸ Both Victor Ponta and his Moldovan counterpart, Iurie Leanca, used the Iasi-Ungheni pipeline project in the 2014 electoral campaigns in which they were trained: the first in the presidential election in Romania to get the votes of Moldovans with dual citizenship, the second one for the parlia-

ly, two Loan Agreements with the EBRD and the EIB for the interconnection of the electricity networks between the Republic of Moldova and Romania were ratified.⁵⁹ The interconnection of electricity networks is an actively supported debate theme by civil society experts as a partial solution to diminishing dependence on Eastern partners, which would ensure predictability and economic stability.

The good practices that Bucharest might transfer to the Republic of Moldova or Ukraine refer to the evolution of the institutional relationship between different governmental and private actors in the energy field, plus a national regulator independent of other public institutions. Also, Romania could undertake several advocacy actions to explain some opportunities or, on the contrary, difficulties that regional inefficiency can produce at the regional level.

It is known that in the field of energy for the Republic of Moldova advancing proposals is often impossible because it depends on Ukrainian suppliers or is surrounded by the Ukrainian energy system, which still operates in certain situations according to different standards - discursive and technical. In this context, Romania can join European advocacy actions to convince Ukraine to become more receptive to the interests of foreign partners.

C. Support the institutional reform in the Republic of Moldova by strengthening cooperation in the field of staff training. On April 23, 2018, in Chisinau, Romanian and Moldovan deputies signed a joint declaration committing to expand and deepen Parliamentary Strategic Partnership for European Integration of the Republic of Moldova to contribute to *"limiting the effects of regional instability through the use of parliamentary diplomacy."* According to the Declaration, its objective

mentary elections in the Republic of Moldova.

⁵⁹ Deschide.md. Interconectarea energetică cu România // Guvernul a aprobat ratificarea împrumutului cu BERD și BEI, Chișinău, 11 iulie 2018, <https://deschide.md/ro/stiri/economic/33811/Interconectarea-energetic%C4%83-cu-Rom%C3%A2nia--Guvernul-a-aprobat-ratificarea-%C3%AEmprumutului-cu-BERD-%C8%99i-BEI.htm>

is to provide support to increase the resilience of the Republic of Moldova to the effects of regional instability through the use of diplomatic instruments.

In the Ukrainian case, the Romanian Gendarmerie is a provider of best practices for the National Guard of Ukraine. The aim of the joint action is to support institutional reforms in Ukraine.⁶⁰ In addition to staff training, the Romanian Gendarmerie transfers knowledge on the management of public order and safety missions. Part of these activities is funded through Romania's Development Assistance Program - RoAid.⁶¹

D. Contribute to the security of the Republic of Moldova by assisting in the training of personnel within the Ministry of Internal Affairs forces and other public institutions, including border management activities and joint response exercises for staff from these institutions, as well as by creating common structures to respond to natural or technological disasters. An example of good practice much welcomed by citizens is the functioning of SMURD⁶² healthcare teams in Moldova.

How Moldova can benefit from other formats of cooperation with Romania-Development Assistance⁶³ - the Republic of Moldova as a priority

As both an EU and a UN member state, Romania has made some international commitments to promote the 17 Sustainable Development Objectives, targeting both underdeveloped and developed countries

⁶⁰ The Romanian Gendarmerie. Jandarmeria Română, furnizor de bune practici pentru Garda Națională a Ucrainei, 26 aprilie 2017, <http://www.comunicare.jandarmeriaromana.ro/jandarmeria-romana-furnizor-de-bune-practici-pentru-garda-nationala-a-ucrainei/>

⁶¹ Glasul.info. Garda Națională a Ucrainei, instruită și consiliată de către Jandarmeria Română în cadrul unui proiect bilateral, 27 aprilie 2018, <https://glasul.info/2018/04/27/garda-nationala-a-ucrainei-instruita-si-consiliata-de-catre-jandarmeria-romana-in-cadrul-unui-proiect-bilateral/>

⁶² Timpul. Din vară SMURD trece Prutul: Medicii moldoveni sunt învățați cum să acționeze în cazurile de urgență, Chișinău, 12 martie 2014, <https://www.timpul.md/articol/din-vara-smurd-trece-prutul-medicii-moldoveni-sunt-invaai-cum-sa-actioneze-in-cazurile-de-urgenta--56388.html>

⁶³ The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Politica de cooperare pentru dezvoltare. Cadrul legal, <https://www.mae.ro/node/1389>

and regions. At the European level, Romania aims at becoming an important actor in order to identify solutions to the new global challenges, as well as to support other states on the road to economic, political and social development.⁶⁴

According to the national report on Romania's official development assistance for 2016,⁶⁵ the main beneficiary country of Romania's bilateral assistance was the Republic of Moldova - 86% (384.3 million RON). Ukraine became a priority only later, and the share of the projects developed under the Romanian-Ukrainian partnership is significantly smaller - about 1% or 3.1 million RON.⁶⁶

Cooperation among civil society actors

Experts from the Romanian civil society have often contributed to the creation of certain dynamics in the European integration of the Republic of Moldova. The civil society expertise has also reached public institutions in the Republic of Moldova. There are no official figures quantifying the dynamics of interactions. In many cases, representatives of the associative environment (think tanks and CSOs) have taken over some of the tasks of the Romanian authorities and have contributed to the transfer of experience and good practices in the field of European reforms.

The CSOs environment is facing a lack of continuity for joint actions between Romania and Ukraine. The cooperation with the Republic of Moldova does not necessarily require official institutionalization of partnerships, but the bilateral relationship with Ukraine

has required a different approach. Even so, after organizing two meetings of the Romania-Ukraine Civil Society Forum (Bucharest - May 2012 and Kyiv - January 2014), this format of cooperation has not benefited from the necessary support to move from a dialogue to concrete measures implemented by the beneficiaries of the initiative. There are bilateral projects between NGOs from Ukraine and Romania, but their number is inferior to those developed and implemented with Moldova. An opportunity window to encourage the interaction of NGOs could be the new programs developed by RoAid, which aims at changing the policy of providing technical and financial assistance.

Cross-border cooperation

Since the end of the previous EU budgetary period, cross-border cooperation has undergone several changes. If previously there was trilateral cooperation with the Eastern neighbors, now there are two separate programs: Romania - Moldova,⁶⁷ and Romania - Ukraine.⁶⁸

The ongoing bilateral cross-border programs have different financial support. For Romania-Ukraine cross-border cooperation (2014-2020), there are 66 mln euros available funds, and 89.1 mln euros for Romania-Moldova. The former bilateral program covers only the border regions. The cooperation program with the Republic of Moldova can be attended by stakeholders from all over the country. The content, objectives, and priorities of the programs are similar. Their separation was rather a technical necessity, to boost action and reduce the dependence of the decision-making process on a larger format. It also took into account some trends in interest dynamics for project implementation under the program.

⁶⁴ The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RoAid. Raportul național privind asistența oficială pentru dezvoltare acordată, de România în 2016, București, <http://www.roaid.ro/uploads/documents/138/raport%20AOD%202016.pdf>

⁶⁵ This being the fifth report and the last one before the establishment of the RoAid International Development Cooperation Agency by the Law 213/2016.

⁶⁶ The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RoAid. Raportul național privind asistența oficială pentru dezvoltare acordată, de România în 2016, București, pag. 10, <http://www.roaid.ro/uploads/documents/138/raport%20AOD%202016.pdf>

⁶⁷ România - Republica Moldova 2014 - 2020, <http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/ro-md>

⁶⁸ România - Ucraina 2014 - 2020, <http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/ro-ua>

RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is dedicated to identifying future opportunities or projects and actions that can be taken over partially or totally by Ukraine after a more elaborate analysis of the results obtained in the relationship between Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

Premises for transferring good practices and policies:

- 1)** Ukrainian officials and decision-makers must take into account the course of the bilateral relationship between Romania and Moldova, which starts from much closer cultural, historical and linguistic affinities.
- 2)** The relationship with Ukraine has been weakened not only by the historical course of the interactions (problem dossiers or lack of resources) but also by the lack of political will of both parties to move forward in the bilateral dialogue.
- 3)** Kyiv must understand Romania's position on certain issues from a double perspective: a state that shares borders with Ukraine and a member state of the European Union. Romania has to coordinate certain activities with the European partners regarding the relationship with Ukraine. The efforts are considerable, especially when national political priorities are confronted with a shortage of resources and vision.
- 4)** Ukrainian authorities and civil society should analyze the content and outcomes of the projects implemented within the partnerships between different state and non-state actors from Romania and the Republic of Moldova and adapt them to their own domestic needs. Moldovan authorities and civil society can be an intermediary or facilitator of the dialogue because they understand better the phenomena of Ukraine's political and economic life.

In the context of the presidency of the European Council 2019, Romania has set as one of its priorities the acceleration of Eastern Partnership processes and projects, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia being the central themes of these initiatives. Assuming a greater role in the European approach to Moldova and Ukraine can bring qualitative changes in the status of Romania at the regional level.

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Results of the Moldovan parliamentary election 2018: effects on development of the political situation and foreign policy

CONSIDERING GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS FOR THE POLITICAL SITUATION

Political situation in Moldova has tends to become polarised. The key factor of this polarisation is the political struggle around geopolitical developments of Moldova both in the country itself and around it on the world stage. Recent practices demonstrate that Moldova's focus on the European integration undergoes a serious challenges.

Another relevant factor of escalation of the political situation is the behavior of Moldovan political elites, where one part of the pro-European (parliamentary) political forces has discredited itself by corruption and another (government) discredits itself by excessive concentration in its hands of the authoritative powers and control over defense and law enforcement agencies that, provided weak support from voters, leads to lack of confidence, legitimacy and authority of power. Extra-parliamentary opposition has faced with lack of mobilization resources, strategic vision, and incapability of uniting pro-European voters around them. Also, it has come across the administrative and legislative challenges for its activities and election campaign such as amended laws on elections, the transition towards mixed majoritarian-proportional electoral system and allocation of majoritarian electoral districts to pro-government candidates.

Using mistakes and failures of the pro-European political forces, the pro-Russian forces headed by the President of Moldova Igor Dodon are gaining more and more influence. And, while official powers of the Moldovan President under the parliamentary presidential model are weak, as politician, Igor Dodon is a remarkable person who can use the Presidential platform to achieve principal changes both in the content and face of the state policies in Moldova.

In turn, the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM), which de facto is a dominating Moldovan political force, is trying to feed it's activities by exploiting the narrative of threats of the pro-Russian revenge. The DPM is also taking not enough efforts to implement reforms in Moldova, ensure non-reversible pro-European course and resorts to accidental alliances with Igor Dodon. Moreover, in certain issues the present government and the parliamentary majority conflict with the EU, argue on the principal EU issues such as the rule of law.

On the one hand, the extra-parliamentary opposition, i.e. the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) and the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (DA), is partly focused on criticizing the present powers and neglects the risks that may result in pro-Russian revenge in Moldova. Opposition runs at risk of underestimating the political potential of the Moldovan President Igor Dodon and his political party, i.e. the Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova (SPRM), seeing the latter only as marionettes guided by the existing forces. However, extra-parliamentary pro-European opposition is not overly concerned with the interests, opportunities and readiness of the Russian partners backing Igor Dodon, and other pro-Russian politicians to provide them with the comprehensive support that would be capable of ensuring their majority in the Moldovan Parliament after the 2019 election. Besides, the extra-parliamentary opposition significantly underestimates the possible power of influence by the (interests) of Moscow on the behaviour of the pro-Russian forces in the post-election period as in case there is pro-Russian parliamentary majority the pro-Russian integration project would have a serious chance for revival and revenge amid further polarisation of society, reinforced of the "Russian world" propaganda and instigation of the Romanian "unionism threat".

On the other hand, in the light of the future parliamentary election in Moldova the destructive Russia's activity (in the Eastern Europe and in Moldova itself) causes particular concern and requires a significant attention. As interested and arrogant external player Moscow is acting dynamic to get a total control of Chisinau and can interfere the country's internal processes. Moldova is among geopolitical targets of the Russia's neoimperial "Russian world" policy in the Eastern Europe and that Russia's attitude towards Moldova will remain offensive and oriented towards regaining firm geopolitical control over Moldova, and that this policy will remain without change under any circumstances (international, regional, internal, security, economy etc.). Moscow expects to regain such control primarily through bringing the pro-Russian forces into power in Moldova and their radical change of the course of Moldova's state policy with the track of targets set within the Russian foreign policy.

If it doesn't succeed, Moscow will inspire internal grounds for its demonstrative "international" interference and promotion of the pro-Russian regime in Moldova. Moldova is the theatre for future efforts associated with development of the 'Russian world' strategy that is currently falling and losing its traction. Russia will increase its interference with the internal processes in Moldova and if Kremlin's plans slow down or are at risk for failure, Moscow will become more and more brutal and drift into apparent voluntarism.

Moscow is creating the intrigue by playing games both with Chisinau and Tiraspol (it doesn't trust Tiraspol fully or regards it as a playing card), and within such intrigues is egging the elites of the separatist Transnistria risky decisions that will lead to general chaos, and frightens them of one another additionally using the 'unionist threat' from Bucharest. Meanwhile Moscow is frightening Bucharest of destabilization of situation in Moldova and waves of refugees fed by Moldavian citizens holding Romanian passports (it is clear that destabilization in Moldova, as well as humanitarian crisis and wave of refugees from Moldova present serious threat to the national security of Ukraine as well). Currently in the context of the coming parliamentary election Moscow focuses on playing games with Chisinau.

Observations show that the current strategy taken up by Moscow with regard to Chisinau is of upstream nature and goes from a subtle (pseudo-democratic and pseudo-legitimate, conspiratorial, agential, criminal and corrupt) — through a moderate (mediate, i.e. within political dialogue and based on democratic and legal procedure, or pseudo-mediate, i.e. based on political blackmailing) — to rude (pressing (escalating), destabilizing, 'revolutional' and even explicit coercive intervention with the view to capturing power by the pro-Russian forces and further planting of the 'Russian world' paradigm. If Moscow can't bring the pro-Russian forces peacefully into power in Moldova, then it will be ready and will try to achieve this by force. In the 'roadmap for Moldova' on Igor Dodon (and regards him as its main option) Moscow places its main bet, however, this is not limited to Dodon and Moscow also provides for interaction with Vladimir (Vlad) Plahotniuc who, under certain critical circumstances of the political process or the situation in whole, may become a replacement.

Thus, in case of Igor Dodon three consecutive projects may be identified:

- main (pseudo-democratic) project - 'legitimate triumph', when the pro-Russian forces headed by Igor Dodon after the parliamentary election will be decisively brought to power in a legal, though a pseudo-legitimate way;
- moderate (compromise) project - 'involvement and calmness', when the pro-Russian forces headed by Igor Dodon would gain during the parliamentary election a weak victory or the same defeat, and it would be reasonable to incorporate other political forces, first of all the DPM headed by Vlad Plahotniuc;
- extremist (destabilization and escalation, a pseudo-revolution as an extreme case) project, aka 'protection of our people', when the pro-Russian forces headed by Igor Dodon would be defeated during the parliamentary election and to bring them to the power would require a voluntaristic, illegal and non-legitimate actions including simultaneous intervention into Moldova.

Analysis of the political situation and the political process shows that the progress of the February 2019 election and formation of the new government coalition may follow four scenarios and each of them would affect both the internal and foreign policies of Moldova. Taking to account the foreign policy dimension of the above changes, their effect on the security in the region and relations with the two neighbour countries of Moldova, i.e. Romania and Ukraine, each of these scenarios deserves attention and will need a response strategy from the Ukrainian and Romanian governments, political forces, international actors and civic society in the region.

66 **Scenario 1. Socialists and Democrats Alliance (a coalition consisting of the Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova (SPRM) and the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM))**

Prerequisites for victory in the election and formation of the coalition

According to the majority of the interviewed experts from Moldova and Romania the most plausible scenario for the upcoming parliamentary election in the Republic of Moldova the majority of mandates will go to representatives from the SPRM (I. Dodon) and DPM (V. Plahotniuc). Their victory would be facilitated by the existing majoritarian-proportional electoral system that was introduced despite the EU recommendations and allows socialists to gain significant number of votes by lists. While in majoritarian electoral districts the DPM candidates will receive the majority of votes.

The DPM will hold the cards in majoritarian electoral districts due to a number of circumstances. Firstly, it is expected that controlling the government party and the defense and law enforcement agencies would resort to administrative resources. Secondly, DPM influences most city mayors in Moldova and so democrats get more local influence.

In its turn the SPRM may have high rates according to the proportional system. With failures of the pro-European political forces and corruption-related scandals, as well as due to increased pro-Russian sentiments among numbers of the Moldovan citizens, the SPRM has reached a significant growing in popularity. There is also a risk that the SPRM will gain informal local support from the DPM (at least according to the Moldavian experts this was so during the presidential election in 2016, when DPM organizations supported candidate Igor Dodon).

The reasons for the SPRM and DPM to unite and to form a parliamentary coalition are ideological (both parties are members to the Socialist International (Socintern)) and practical. Even now the parties engage in rather explicit cooperation within the parliament and have experience in ad hoc voting; it is notable that according to the 'political kitchen' experts Igor Dodon is under control and influence of Vlad Plahotniuc.

Such scenario is supported also by the facts that both political forces more and more resort to the so-called 'moldovenism' political paradigm, i.e. the course that was developed and introduced in Moldova during the CPM under the leadership of Vladimir Voronin, and, unlike the unionists who support union with Romania, highlight singularity of the Moldovan nation, as well as features of the Moldova's development that disable performance of certain guidelines and requirements from Brussels.

Impact on domestic policy

Victory in the election and formation of a the DPM and SPRM coalition in the new government will ensure stable parliamentary majority and shift opposing political parties to margins of the Moldovan politics. Small numbers of members in the future PAS and Platforma DA fraction(s) will make their votes insignificant during future political debates and reduce their influence on both domestic and foreign policies of Moldova.

Alliance with socialists would provide democrats with additional legitimacy and allow them to cement the existing status quo, when most of state institutions are subject to control and influence of DPM. In such configuration Vlad Plahotniuc possibly will try to play a role of the Moldovan Prime Minister. Meanwhile, status and role of the President Igor Dodon would be reinforced. Government DPM/SPRM coalition would obviously end the practice of provisional ousters of the Moldovan President (today the government coalition resorts to such practice when the President refuses to promulgate government decisions or sign the laws).

Eventually diverse composition of the parliamentary coalition would provide the new government with actual carte blanche as according to formal signs such coalition would represent vast majority of the Republic of Moldova and so will have discretion to set domestic policy priorities.

Decisive role may be given to implementation of the scenario with formation of the socialist and democrat

alliance to resolve the Transnistria issue. Even now the Moldovan Government is being significantly soft during the dialogue with representatives from the separatist region; in particular, they consented to recognize automobile numbers of the so-called Transnistrian Moldavian Republic provided. These would not include any TMR symbols. In his turn President Igor Dodon is carrying on an intensive dialogue with the Transnistrian leader Vadim Krasnoselski, supporting the Russian peacemakers presence in the Transnistria and, apparently, is ready to reintegrate Transnistria according to Moscow scenario of federalization or asymmetric federalization with exclusive rights for the region.

Impact on the Moldovan foreign policy

Formation of the socialist and democrat alliance would absolutely affect the Moldovan foreign policy (first of all its relations with the EU) as well. So far, the EU quite often resorts to criticizing Moldova both on the formal and informal levels. Brussels is disappointed of decelerating reforms in Moldova, rolling up democratic freedoms and infringement of opposition (the latest flagrant instance was cancellation by the court of election results in Chisinau where the victory went to the Platforma DA leader Andrei Năstase). The EU uses financial reasons to provide macro-financial assistance for the purpose of fulfilling the EU instructions. However, both for the transition to the majoritarian-proportional system and for cancellation of the election results in Chisinau the political leaders of Moldova neglected the comments provided by the EU. The situation may only aggravate in case when SPRM and DPM form coalition which would represent most of the Moldovan citizens and have legitimacy supported by the recent election.

Formation of the socialist and democrat alliance will also have negative impact on relations with Romania. The fact is that currently SPRM is widely exploiting theses on the risks due to union with Romania and, consequently, loss of the Moldova's singular identity. The SPRM representatives accuse their opponents

of facilitating the Romanian unionists. The expected presence increase in the parliament and participation in the government coalition would hardly lead to weakening of such rhetoric. Besides, any improvements in relations with Bucharest and in the Romanian status as the EU Member State can't be expected, so relations between Bucharest and Chisinau will rely on the wider context of the relations between Moldova and the EU.

However, we may expect warming on Russian direction. President of Moldova Igor Dodon has developed good working contact with the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. In addition, Igor Dodon also supports reaching out to Russia, inclusion of Moldova into the Russian integration projects and strengthening of economic cooperation with the RF. In view of the expected cooling of the relations with the EU one cannot exclude that the socialist and democrat alliance will try to compensate losses in the relations with the EU by deeper contacts with Russia, including playing the Transnistrian card.

Speaking about the relations with Ukraine and taking into account the existing antagonism between the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Moldovan President Igor Dodon improvements in the relations under rising of the SPRM can't be expected and uncertain positions of Petro Poroshenko in the context of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary election in Ukraine in 2019. Furthermore, it is not improbable that even the level achieved so far in these relations will be lost. Doubts also relate to preservation of the Moldovan activity within the Georgia-Moldova-Ukraine Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. It is likely that implementation of the project for ensuring joint border monitoring by Chisinau and Kyiv along the Transnistrian section will be suspended.

Moreover, if at the initiative of the SPRM Moldova will review the existing prohibition to rotation of Russian soldiers in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, this will also have an adverse impact on the security in Ukraine.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Whereas this scenario is the most probable one, the official Kyiv should reason from taking to account emergence of new probable vectors in building the relations between Ukraine and other countries in the region. This is why there should be new agenda elaborated for the existing institutional platforms for bilateral and multilateral cooperation. For this purpose, it would be reasonable to conduct preliminary discussions with the government and non-government expert institutions and develop a preliminary mid-term action plan providing for active Ukrainian leadership in development and promotion of joint initiatives.
- 2.** Chances of the DPM are highly estimated with regard to keeping office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova in the future coalition government. In this format the Ukrainian diplomats will have to take maximum efforts to keep Moldova within the framework of recently adopted consultation plan for the foreign policy agencies with regard to EU integration for 2019–2020.
- 3.** Existence of such SPRM/DPM coalition may leave behind its efforts to get along with the EU and continue heading for complete implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement. In this context joint initiatives of the three countries, i.e. Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, may provide additional political grounds to incentivize the new government to implement reforms and fulfil the policy part of the Association Agreement.
- 4.** Provision of political support to the EU integration may involve initiating informal ministerial meetings in Moldova within the Eastern Partnership framework, regular session or meeting of the Euronest committees etc. Taking to account that Ukraine will co-chair the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, Kyiv may initiate a number of measures in Moldova itself.
- 5.** In view of the possibility for strengthening of the pro-Russian orientation of the Moldovan foreign policy, the official Kyiv and Bucharest will need to conduct diplomatic work with regard to convincing the new Moldovan powers to be of rationale for preserving its membership in the pro-European initiatives, e.g. in the regional organization GUAM and the Inter-parliamentary Assembly, and with regard to implementation of all agreed prospective plans that cover their activities.

Prerequisites for victory in the election

Despite significant influence of the DPM in Moldova its popularity among voters should not be underestimated. So far, the level of support of the democrats and their leader Vlad Plahotniuc is rather low, legitimacy of the current government formed by the DPM is doubtful and probability of high ratings according to the proportional system is low. In addition, Vlad Plahotniuc is accused of capturing control of the defense and law enforcement agencies. All these facts favor the Moldovan President Igor Dodon and his political force, i.e. Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova (SPRM).

In practical dimension Vlad Plahotniuc and Igor Dodon suit each other as ad hoc partners. Igor Dodon may accuse the DPM government of slowing down implementation of their election promises and Vlad Plahotniuc and the DPM exploit the pro-Russian rhetoric of Igor Dodon for the purpose of positioning as a single political force that has potential to talk Moldova out of moving towards Russia. Still, it does not prevent their ad hoc cooperation with regard to counteracting the extra-parliamentary opposition of PAS and Platforma DA.

However, ambitions of Igor Dodon let us assume that the SPRM leader will inspire the party to absolute victory. And the situation may change radically in case when SPRM gains majority vote in the elections that will allow it to form the government single-handedly. Inter alia the SPRM expect that such scenario may be implemented due to infighting within the DPM.

In such case the Moldovan President will gain opportunity to influence the domestic and foreign policies of Moldova at least as one of his predecessors, the leader of the Communist Party of Moldova Vladimir Voronin (Moldovan President in 2001–2009).

The SPRM's best card is the pro-Russian rhetoric and close links with Russia, as well as populist criticism of the government. Current situation looks like the pro-Russian forces were inspired by social sentiments and emerging power prospects; provided

prominent support from Russian partners and while exploiting vision of traditional values and favor of the Russian Orthodox Christian Church they will quite legitimately lead the political process by developing their influence and its electoral conversion into victory in the parliamentary election and formation of the parliamentary coalition and relevant government, ensuring robust control over the political situation, parliament, government and defense and law enforcement agencies.

To a certain extent it is played up to by the SPRM and representatives of the political forces that advocate union with Romania. Socialists make a profit of the fact that their activity warms up fears of the pro-Russian citizens.

Impact on domestic policy

Victory of the SPRM in the election would cause radical changes in the domestic policy of Moldova. It is likely that this will lead to increased pressure on PAS, Platforma DA and on the DPM. SPRM leaders will try to ensure redistribution of control over defense and law enforcement agencies, as well as financial and economic flows in the Republic of Moldova that are now under significant control by the DPM. As long as DPM would hardly give up its positions voluntarily, the SPRM will seek support from other partners (quite possibly Russia). With great probability, if SPRM gains electoral victory and faces non-acceptance of such victory by other political forces and, consequently, political destabilization and riots, President of Moldova may ask Russia for support and even initiate intervention of the Russian 'stabilization forces' into Moldova. In this case Igor Dodon's strength will be his keeping a single and quite legitimate government institution in the Republic of Moldova.

The first expected steps of SPRM will include cancellation of the measures taken by the current government to ensure legal restriction of the Russia's influence in Moldova and creating conditions for Russian business, language and culture.

Socialist victory in the election may also lead to dramatic developments during settlement of the Transnistria issue. Even now President Igor Dodon is sending definite signals to Russia telling he is ready to engage in a dialogue and reconciliation by means of Moldova's yielding to Russia. Such yielding will be only greater in case SPRM gains control of the government as well. The issue of withdrawal of the Russian troops from the Transnistria region will be removed from the agenda (despite inclusion by the Resolutions of the OSCE summit of 1999 and by the UN GA Resolution of 2018 adopted in Istanbul). Maybe the socialist government of the Republic of Moldova will agree to the so-called Kozak Plan – 2, a Russian scenario providing for reintegration in Moldova on Russia's conditions while keeping the Russian troops in Transnistria and providing the Transnistrian leaders with veto right with regard to Moldovan foreign policy. The SPRM expect that Moldova's losses due to such Transnistria reintegration scenario would be compensated by extended electoral base of the SPRM impact on the citizens of Transnistria.

Impact on the Moldovan foreign policy

If socialists form their government, Moldova will also undergo significant changes in its foreign policy. Although Moldova has signed the Association Agreement with the EU, Igor Dodon had many times stated that he was not advocating approach to the EU. Instead, priorities of Igor Dodon and the SPRM subject to his control include the Eurasian vector of the foreign policy and cooperation with the EurAsEC, where the issue at hand is establishing of the Customs Union for the Single Economic Area. The EU will definitely retain its financial influence on Moldova and this will probably prevent denunciation of the Association Agreement; however, the cooperation will be limited, or even frozen. The SPRM government will have an opportunity to fulfil plans of the President Igor Dodon as to termination of cooperation with NATO and closing of the Information and Documentation Centre on NATO in Chisinau.

Significant deterioration/stress will also be peculiar of the Moldova's relations with Romania. Both the presidential campaign of Igor Dodon and present rhetoric of the SPRM use the 'Romanian threat' to mobilize the key and the potential segments of the SPRM electorate. The SPRM frighten the Russian-speaking voters of forced romanization and annexation to Romania where the Russian-speakers will be treated as 'second-rate' people. Under such conditions there are no reasons to expect better environment due to formation of socialist government.

Instead, relations with Russian Federation will develop in an integrative way. The socialist government will have reasons to form in the Republic of Moldova a pro-Russian exclave and a place for Russian troops along the borders with Ukraine and Romania. Moreover, Moldova's yielding to Russia in the course of settling the Transnistria issue will create negative examples for Ukraine.

As for the immediate relations between Moldova and Ukraine, these will undergo significant deterioration in case socialists form the parliamentary majority. While currently there is no dialogue between the Presidents, in case of the socialist victory in the election such practice will apply to inter-government and, maybe, to inter-parliament links as well. While slow-down will involve both cooperation within framework of the Georgia-Moldova-Ukraine Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, efforts to renew cooperation under GUAM will be brought to naught.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Implementation of the scenario providing for the SPRM majority in the parliament may currently be regarded as the most adverse option in the context of ensuring continued movement of Moldova towards Europe and retaining ad hoc regional partnership with Ukraine. It can be expected that Moldova will join the countries which, with regard to the issues which are relevant for Ukraine, would support the pro-Russian views at the level of international organizations.
- 2.** Having lost Moldova as partner on the international framework, Kyiv will have to build its strategy on strengthening of economic links with the neighbour country, implementation of the planned bilateral transport and infrastructure projects (e.g. opening of the Ungur-Bronitsa bridge for passenger automobile traffic, construction of a new bridge across Dniester river near Cosăuți and Yampil settlements) and on strengthening of bilateral cooperation.
- 3.** There is a big risk that the new socialist government may cancel implementation of the Association Agreement and try to replace it with a less binding bilateral document with the EU, e.g. as in case of Armenia or Belarus. Ukraine and Romania should use the available formal and informal channels to make Moldova refrain from such step.
- 4.** Russia's influence increase in Moldova will force Ukraine to take enhanced measures to ensure safety of the border and border areas taking to account potential increase of Russian presence in Transnistria. In this context enhancement the European EUBAM mission at the Ukraine-Moldova border can be discussed.
- 5.** The agreement of joint positions with other partners within framework of the 5+2 negotiations Ukraine should block any efforts to implement the so-called Kozak Plan- 2 providing for reintegration of the Transnistria region into Moldova. If Kremlin succeeds in implementing this plan with the assistance of Moldovan socialists, this reintegration pattern will become another Russia's trump card for pressing on Ukraine with regard to relations with occupied areas in the Donbas region.

72 **Scenario 3.** Everybody against the DPM (a coalition consisting of the Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova (SPRM) and other political forces excluding the Democrat Party of the Republic of Moldova (DPM))

Prerequisites for formation of the coalition

In spite of high chances of the DPM to gain victory in majoritarian electoral districts, and the resources available to its leader Vlad Plahotniuc may procure inclusion to the DPM group deputies from other political forces. As well as non-affiliated deputies elected in majoritarian districts, a scenario when other political forces would joint their efforts to counteract the DPM cannot be ruled out. Under such scenario the SPRM may offer joining efforts to other political forces that will become Moldovan MPs in February 2019. An interesting thing in this context is what would be the reaction of the existing extra-parliamentary opposition — PAS and Platforma DA. PAS leader Maia Sandu is in denial over possibility of such union. However, there is no guarantee that leader of Platforma DA Andrei Năstase would not agree to that. While organizing protests against the current governing party Năstase also resorted to even more notorious ad hoc alliances. For instance, he used to hold joint meetings with the radical pro-Russian political force "Partidului Nostru" (Our Party) headed by Renato Usatii (currently subject to criminal case and hiding in Moscow). For his voters Andrei Năstase explained his decision to cooperate with Usatii by a necessity to use any opportunities to defeat the DPM. There is a risk that even in the new parliament Platforma DA will be ready to form any alliances to defeat Vlad Plahotniuc. In this case there will be a provisional overlap between interests of Platforma DA and SPRM.

Besides, SPRM will be able to receive additional bonuses. For the general public and international community the coalition consisting of socialists and EU-opposition will have signs of an inclusive government coalition that will look like an effort to overcome social polarization and will demonstrate readiness of the SPRM for a political dialogue with former opponents.

Impact on domestic policy

If the political forces in the new parliament form a coalition under such scenario, the impact on the Moldovan domestic policy would be very difficult to predict. It is obvious that DPM will try to retain its power and, for that purpose, make efforts to undermine such scenario at any cost. In such case noticeable steps

to be made by DPM can be expected with regard to forming of the coalition based on their party or making efforts to instigate circumstances which would result in an inefficient parliament and its incapability of forming the government or, alternatively, of initiating extraordinary election in the Republic of Moldova.

Catastrophic may be also the impact of the mentioned scenario on the existing extra-parliamentary opposition. Firstly, there is a very high possibility that this will lead to split in the Andrei Năstase – Maia Sandu tandem. It is not improbable that such decision will not gain complete support both among the leaders and ordinary members of the parties. For significant number of voters such decision will mean sell-out of their interests. In such case both political forces will suffer loss of goodwill and electorate.

Secondly, given the tactics such scenario may appear profitable for the existing extra-parliamentary opposition as it would allow not only to gain the MP status, but also to enter immediately the governmental coalition and the government. However, with regard to the strategy such decision would have extremely adverse implications. Step by step, PAS and Platforma DA are mastering the niche given to progressive pro-European forces. Previously this niche was retained by efforts made by the pro-European political forces that took over the government in 2009, in particular, it were the Liberal Party of Moldova and the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova. However, these forces are gradually losing their authority due to political feuds, corruption and incapability of implementing the reforms. And, vice versa, the extra-parliamentary opposition is gaining its electorate in the niche. However, in case of coalition with the SPRM the pro-European extra-parliamentary opposition will also be compromised. Thus, both the pro-European policy and the pro-Western vector of the foreign policy of Moldova will be finally discredited in an indirect way.

Impact on the Moldovan foreign policy

As in case of the socialist and democrat alliance, the socialist alliance with the current extra-parliamentary political forces will have stagnant implications on the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova, as well as on its relations with the EU, Russia, Romania and Ukraine.

In spite of the generally good attitude of Brussels towards the Platforma DA and PAS, the EU has learned a good lesson from the political forces that formed the Alliance for European Integration (LPM, LDPM and DPM) after the 2009 election. Therefore, it is unlikely that Brussels will provide its support based on the pro-European slogans. Instead, it will demand the new government implement the reforms, fulfil the Association Agreement and fight against corruption. At the same time there are doubts about whether the Platforma DA members (as it was mentioned earlier, leader of the PAS Maia Sandu was in denial over possible alliance with socialists) who will form the minority in the government coalition with the socialists, will be able to ensure proper implementation of the EU requirements. In this situation relations between Moldova and the EU will retain their status quo. The pro-European part of the government will not be able to fulfil its promises as they will be blocked by the SPRM.

It is difficult to predict any progress in the relations with Romania. Following its entry into the coalition with Platforma DA, the SPRM will apparently soften its anti-Romanian rhetoric. However, this will not change the wider context as Romania is member to NATO and the EU, so relations between Bucharest

and Chisinau will rely on the wider context of the relations between Moldova, the EU, and Russia.

As for the Russian vector, the approximation and movement towards integration can be expected. The SPRM will probably endeavor to provide convincing arguments for the pro-Russian decisions and, in spite of criticizing these decisions, the partners in coalition will not block their adoption. In this regard the only thing the DPM will have to do will be to observe the developments. However, such soft (weak) approach to development of the relations may not satisfy Moscow which expects much higher rate and deeper sense to be peculiar of the bilateral relations within the 'Russian world' strategy. Kremlin has been already enduring for a long time the 'inactivity' of the SPRM and Igor Dodon. If the political weakness within the Russian vector remains under the new parliament and government, it will be highly likely that Moscow will increase its pressure on Chisinau, use the language of economic sanctions and political blackmailing and will block the dialogue between Chisinau and Tiraspol.

In the context of war with the Russian Federation Kyiv wants to see Chisinau as an ally. Hybrid coalition comprised of the pro-European and pro-Russian forces will not look as such ally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** While not being a prerequisite for convergence of bilateral relations with Ukraine, a hybrid coalition comprised of the pro-European and pro-Russian forces will provide opportunities to preserve the pro-European orientation in the foreign policy taken up by Chisinau, albeit as a less efficient option. In cooperation with the EU Member States Kyiv should put emphasis on the necessity to implement the Association Agreement and continue the initiated reforms.
- 2.** Particular influence and support for the pro-European forces may be initiated through political inquiries and guidance from the European political clubs, e.g. European People's Party including such members as the political parties of M. Sandu and A. Năstase.
- 3.** An investigation on embezzlement of 1 bln USD from Moldovan banks may be made relevant within such coalition. Currently representatives of the extra-parliamentary opposition are placing this issue among priorities on the agenda of their election programs. Successful identification and prosecution of the persons involved in this major fraud may add positive moments to relations with the EU. By means of political statements Ukraine and its partners may keep this issue continuously within focus of the coalition forces.
- 4.** It is necessary that, through the contacts with representatives of the pro-European forces within the coalition, Ukraine and Romania deter the new government from cancelling the resolutions adopted by the previous government with regard to enhancing Moldova's resilience to the Russian disinformation and other hybrid manifestations.
- 5.** It is desirable to retain, due to the pro-European forces within the coalition, the existing forms of international cooperation between Ukraine and Moldova (such as GUAM), or cooperation between Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine within particular format of the Eastern Partnership.

74 Scenario 4. Incapability of forming coalition (neither of the political forces is able to form the government majority single-handedly and does not agree to the coalition)

Prerequisites for the scenario

This is the scenario where neither of the political forces would gain enough votes and the parliamentary parties would not agree to form the coalition; it is hardly probable, yet it cannot be excluded. It will be implemented, if the SPRM does not gain the majority votes, cannot mix well with the DPM, Platforma DA and PAS and, in their turn, Platforma DA and PAS refuse to form coalition with DPM (both political forces are in denial over possible bloc with DPM).

Impact on domestic policy

Such scenario would lead to deep political crisis in the domestic policy. Incapability of forming the government coalition will entail dissolution of the parliament and early election. The Moldovan President Igor Dodon may gain relative victory in this case as he would remain the only legitimate representative of the powers in Moldova. However, even with the 'acting' status the present government would hardly let Igor Dodon use such situation for his own benefit. It is more likely there will be a status quo.

Impact on the Moldovan foreign policy

Foreign policy will undergo 'stagnation'. Neither the EU nor Russian will be interested in interacting with the invalid government, whose decisions may be challenged by successors, except that Moscow will make further more decisive efforts to bring the pro-Russian forces into power. During that period Moscow will engage in the official relations with Igor Dodon in that way. As for interaction with the EU, such relations will be loaded with pro-Russian background of Dodon as a politician, as well as with the current constitutional powers of the President that would limit his possibilities significantly both in domestic policy and on the international fora (taking to account he would not even have ad hoc majority in the parliament). Cooperation of Chisinau with Kyiv and Bucharest will also be slowed down. International players and immediate neighbors of Moldova will expect resolution of the political crisis. As it is demonstrated by previous crises in the Republic of Moldova (due to incapability of the parliament of electing the president in 2009–2012, the president had the 'acting' status) such waiting may run over time. During that period all foreign policy initiatives of Chisinau will be frozen.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is important both for Ukraine and Bucharest that Russia does not use such political crisis for full-scale or partial destabilization of the situation with the view to enhancing its influence on the political elites and ensuring better external management. The key recommendation may be to enhance the media profile of these countries in the Moldovan media environment.
2. Through the existing bilateral and multilateral communication channels one should send a message to the political forces about necessity to retain the existing institutional and contractual relations both with the EU and Russia.
3. On the bilateral level Ukraine should continue implementing the infrastructure, energy and transport projects that do not require consolidated political support from the Moldovan parliament.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations based on the comprehensive analysis are applicable for the each mentioned scenario of the upcoming parliamentary election in Moldova. These recommendations are aimed at creating a positive impact on the developments in the foreign policy of Moldova and enhancing of the international links both on the bilateral and multilateral level.

Bilateral political dialogue between Ukraine and Moldova

1. As a positive sign can be from relaunching the political consultations on the management level of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and of Moldova which were resumed in February 2018 and continued in October 2018. This format of supporting the political dialogue has extensive and relevant agenda that includes, in particular, areas of work such as joint initiatives on the way towards integration of the two countries into the EU, ways of interaction within international organizations, problematic issues of bilateral relations between Ukraine and Moldova, ways of the Transnistria issue solution, information and cyber security, as well as cultural and humanitarian cooperation. During the visit of the Moldovan Minister of Foreign Affairs Tudor Ulianovschi to Ukraine in October 2018, the Inter-Ministerial Political Consultation Plan *for 2018-2020* was signed. It is important to ensure by February 2019 a maximum relevance of all cooperation formats proposed in the plan, which particularly relates to the ways of reducing hybrid Russian influence on the territories of Moldova and Ukraine with the particular focus on the information and cyber component.

2. The Inter-Ministerial Political Consultation Plan for *2018-2020* may be used as basis in development of additional mid-term operational plans for cooperation between Ukraine and Moldova. This work may be conducted in two dimensions. Firstly, based on the inter-ministerial format of the consultations it would be good to move to the mixed inter-agency format involving different ministries and agencies in coordinated activities. An important aspect quite usually avoided by government officials from both countries, is involvement of civil society institutions into joint activities. Another dimension is to focus the operational document on particular topics. For instance, a roadmap for counteracting hybrid threats or enhancing information security in both countries may be elaborated.

Information-driven cooperation

3. While developing its information policies with regard to Moldova, Ukraine should rely on the existing concept documents and arrangements that have already been adapted in Ukraine. In particular, it seems logical to form innovative components in the strategies of relations with neighbour countries. Taking to account the possibilities provided in the government action plan for implementation of the popularization concept of "Ukraine in the world" and promotion of the Ukraine's interests in the global information environment.

4. The prevailing Russian influence on the information environment in Moldova creates favourable conditions for enhancing of destabilizing Russian factors during the active phase of election in Moldova. There is an urgent need for extending information presence of Ukraine in the neighbouring country. Providing objective vision of the developments in the social and political situation in Ukraine by the Ukrainian and foreign sources may improve information resilience of the Moldovan citizens with regard to conventional disinformation narratives. In this context the positive process is gradual increase of information presence in the Moldovan cable networks of

the UA|TV international broadcasting channel that is the member of the International Broadcasting Multimedia Platform of Ukraine. The first steps were initiated in 2016 with regard to access to analogue cable TV networks of the SRL Megatrafic companies. In August 2018 the channel appeared on the network of the Moldovan cable TV and Internet provider StarNet, which is the second biggest telecommunications provider in Moldova serving the entire country. However, along with further extension of the information presence of the Ukrainian international broadcasting channels, significant attention of the Ukrainian providers should be drawn to creation of the best attractive media content which would compete with the Russian TV products.

5. In the period between December 2018 and January 2019, with the support from the partner and donor organizations it would be advisable to arrange a visit to Ukraine for a group of Moldovan journalists from leading TV channels, printed and online media which form the public opinion within the Moldovan society. The visit agenda would include attending both central executive authorities in charge of implementing the Association Agreement, key reforms and the agenda of bilateral relations between Ukraine and Moldova, as well as non-government institutions. An important part should be visiting of places near the contact line with the occupied territories of the Donbas region. It should also cover provocative topics such as issuance of the Tomos for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and implementing decommunization process in Ukraine. As we know, all these topics are relevant, and Russia uses them to distort the reality and form the targeted influence on minds of the vulnerable social groups. This is why massive information from the visitors on the eve of the election may in some way influence decrease in efficiency of the influence of Russian anti-Ukrainian and anti-European narratives. In order to form the representative group of the Moldovan media at the preparation stage it would also be desirable to conduct consultations and elaborate relevant algorithm for selection of the group subject to features of the media environment.

6. In the long term it would be practically desirable for Moldova to continue implementing projects of non-government think tanks targeted at comparing the information resilience systems in the Central and Eastern European countries. For instance, such comparative data is available from the DRI (Disinformation Resilience Index¹) project; they provide tools for identification of institutional and legislative gaps in state disinformation resilience policy and offer best practices of solving the above issues in other countries of the region. Annual benchmarking of the dynamics in disinformation resilience processes and other hybrid manifestations of aggression may come in handy for the government agencies that are entrusted with implementing state security policies.

7. In addition, in the light of the long-term information cooperation Ukraine should develop its own market for information and entertaining TV products that may be interesting for providers from neighbouring countries including Moldova.

¹ Disinformation Resilience Index is based on the complex methodology which enables multi-faceted and objective analysis of communications measures and awareness and psychological campaigns of Kremlin in the selected countries, as well as evaluating the effects of disinformation produced by Kremlin, <http://prismua.org/dri/>

Cooperation with the Ukrainians abroad

8. Unfortunately, numerous researches demonstrate that most of the ethnic Ukrainians residing in the Republic of Moldova are the social group vulnerable to the Russian propaganda and carrying the pro-Russian sentiments. This is potential threat both for Moldova and Ukraine. In this context there may be bilateral initiatives dedicated to enhancing resilience to the Russian disinformation that may be implemented by the Ukrainian and Moldovan SCOs. Certain resource portfolio for such activities may be provided by StratCom East Task Force, a dedicated unit of the EU's European External Action Service (EEAS) entrusted with counteracting manifestations of the Russian disinformation.

9. Particular positive impact may be ensured also a visit to Moldova by the Ukrainian World Congress (UWC) President to meet the ethnic Ukrainian communities. Such visits to foreign countries were with constructive character and dedicated to overcoming the stereotypes and explaining the situation in Ukraine. Taking into account that the UWC is an international organization of the Ukrainian people, and organizations of the Ukrainian diaspora in Moldova are members to the Congress, such visit may not be regarded as interference with the domestic affairs of another country as it would be under similar activities carried out by some Ukrainian government members or politicians.

EU integration vector of the cooperation and the Eastern Partnership Policy

10. So far, the most common and promising directions of cooperation are created by the EU integration vector and participation of Ukraine and Moldova in the Eastern Partnership policies. Implementation of the Association Agreements and use of visa-free travel across EU provide additional advantages for both societies. In view of the current growing misunderstanding in the relations between EU and Moldova and that official Chisinau is witnessing curtailment of the financial assistance by Brussels, the Moldovan government should now to prove its dedication to continuing implementation of the Association Agreement. Common political positions of the three Eastern Partnership member states having signed their Association Agreements may facilitate renewal of normal dialogue between the EU and Moldova. In its turn, through updating of the relevant EU integration part of the above-mentioned inter-ministerial consultation plan Ukraine may also join in drawing attention to the EU integration vector taken up by Chisinau.

11. Currently special services of Ukraine clearly state expecting massive attempts to interfere with the electronic systems to be used during 2019 election in Ukraine. Relevant threat applies to the security of the election process in Moldova. As the first aid for Ukraine and Moldova, the EU can create an ad hoc working group or platform to counteract cyber interventions with the election process during the parliamentary and presidential elections. The European partners in creating such platform may be Romania, the United Kingdom, Germany and France.

12. Apart from the election cases, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia should initiate creation of a respective expert working group within the inter-governmental Platform 1, which would on a permanent basis focus on elaborating common tools for fighting against threats in the Eastern Partnership region.

13. An interesting thing in the context of ensuring democratic and transparent election may be the use of the Russian tools to provide additional public or parliamentary observatory missions. With the view to conducting

complete verification of the election progress Moldova may be visited by an ad hoc mission from the Civil Society Forum or a monitoring mission from members of the Georgia-Moldova-Ukraine Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. Such missions would present additional reasons for drawing up objective opinions on election results. However, the situation may vary depending on the position taken up by the DMP leaders who are interested in gaining victory in majoritarian districts.

14. The inaugural session of the Georgia-Moldova-Ukraine Inter-Parliamentary Assembly took place in Tbilisi in October 2018 before the last direct presidential election in Georgia. It would be practical to hold a regular or an extraordinary meeting of the Assembly in January–February 2019 in Chisinau with the view to demonstrating the political support for the EU integration and necessity to solve common security issues.

15. To ensure dissemination of the information about the EU-Moldova Association Agreement at the regional level, may be promoted the Ukrainian practice of holding of joint meetings of bodies created within framework of the Agreement (councils/committees/subcommittees) in particular areas.