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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The materials are realized by Lina Grau, foreign policy expert and programme coordinator with APE.

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3. Experts' opinion about the situation after the presidential elections and prospects for the Republic of Moldova. **Pavel Postică**, Promo-Lex; **Petru Macovei**, API; **Veronica Crețu**, president of the Open Government Institute; **Victor Chirilă**, executive director of APE.

The last period was marked by several important events for Moldova.



According to the statements made immediately after the elections by the representatives of the international observers' mission, the second round of presidential elections in Moldova respected the fundamental freedoms and international standards. However, the mission criticized the insufficient ballot papers in some polling stations abroad, but also in stations inside the country, for the residents of the Transnistrian region. "Despite the efforts to prepare for a large presence at voting, in certain polling stations abroad and in stations for the Transnistrian voters, many citizens were unable to vote because the stations ran out of ballot papers," reads the press release of the mission.



Hundreds of people protested in Chisinau against the way the elections were organized in the second round of presidential elections at the polling stations abroad and stations where Transnistrian residents voted. They demanded the resignation of the Central Election Commission and repeated presidential elections. Protests were also held in the diaspora, whose representatives said they would sue the Moldovan government for having restricted the right to vote of its citizens abroad.



The Government and Parliament will have a constructive relationship with the newly elected President, Igor Dodon, said the speaker Adrian Candu and Prime Minister Pavel Filip, who congratulated both candidates that competed in the second round of presidential elections. The Prime Minister, Pavel Filip, said that people should be the main winner and that the Association Agreement with the EU and the reforms are irreversible, regardless of the presidential election results. Adrian Candu said that Moldova's European future does not depend on one person even if he is president.



Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said Russia is opting for normalizing the relations with Moldova after Igor Dodon's victory. Dmitry Peskov said that Moscow is pleased with Dodon's statements that he would like a closer relationship with Moscow as well as with the statements of the winner of the Bulgarian presidential elections, Rumen Radev. According to the *Interfax* Russian agency, Peskov spoke against using the "pro-Russian presidents" term in the case of the two winners. Igor Dodon said he was personally congratulated by the Russian President Vladimir Putin. However, Putin is the only head of state who congratulated the socialist leader on his victory in elections before the Constitutional Court validated the results.

The European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy, Johannes Hahn, said he received assurances from the Prime Minister, Pavel Philip, immediately after the second round of elections, that Moldova will continue its pro-European policy after Igor Dodon's victory in the presidential elections. In an interview for the Radio Free Europe, Hahn said he is planning to visit Moldova in the first four months of next year, during a tour to all Eastern Partnership countries. As for Igor Dodon's victory, Hahn said "the developments must be closely monitored, but there is no reason for excessive nervousness". According to Hahn, Dodon's victory is also due to the fact that the past so-called pro-European governments have compromised the European integration idea by being involved in corruption cases.



Republic of Moldova after presidential elections



For the first time in the last 20 years, Moldovans were called to the ballot boxes to elect the president. In the second round, the leader of the Socialists Party, Igor Dodon, obtained 52.11 percent and the Solidarity Action Party leader, Maia Sandu, - 47.89 percent. The turnout in the second round was 53.45 percent and the difference between the two candidates - more than 67 thousand votes. The new president can take office after his mandate is validated by the Constitutional Court, which has not yet occurred.

In the second round of elections, an unprecedented mobilization of the diaspora took place. The mobilization was done through social networks and the turnout of over 138 000 was nearly double compare to the first round. Thousands of people were unable to vote at the 100 polling stations opened abroad because of overcrowding and lack of ballot papers at several polling stations. Each polling station abroad was provided with 3,000 ballot papers, the maximum amount as provided by the Electoral Code. Nearly four thousand voters filed, individually or collectively, complaints

and petitions at the polling stations in Canada, Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy and the Russian Federation.

The chairwoman of the Central Electoral Commission, Alina Russu, apologized for the organization of the voting abroad, including in Great Britain, Italy, France, Germany, Russia and Romania, where there were not enough ballots. "We regret the situation that so many Moldovans could not express their right to vote. What happened today is a lesson to be learned by us and by other institutions involved in the organization of elections in Moldova".

Maia Sandu, PAS leader, demanded invalidation of the elections because of violations - limited right to vote of the citizens abroad, organized transportation to the polling stations of the Transnistrian residents, multiple voting or voting instead of other individuals and others.

The observers' mission organized by Promo-Lex noted in its report that a significant number of voters were transported in an organized way from Transnistria to the polling stations on the right bank- about 164 units of transport have been registered. The Transnistrian voters have been seen to photograph their ballots or the ID with the "Voted" stamp.

On Friday, November 18th, the Central Election Commission (CEC) officially announced the victory of Igor Dodon in the elections and sent the final report to the Constitutional Court (CC), which will take a decision "after the settlement of all legal disputes". Alexandru Tanase, chairman of the Constitutional Court, has complained about pressure being put on him to cancel the presidential elections won by Igor Dodon.

During the protests organized on Sunday, November 20th, the diaspora representatives in several European cities said they would sue the Moldovan state for having restricted the right to vote.

Lina Grâu

Igor Dodon: We will have to carry out negotiations in a tripartite format – Russia, UE, and the Republic of Moldova



Igor Dodon said on Monday evening during a program on the Russian television station *Rossia1* he was personally congratulated by the Russian President Vladimir Putin, who invited him to pay an official visit to Moscow. Dodon hopes that this will be his first visit abroad as head of state.

Igor Dodon also said that the European orientation has become unpopular in Moldova, its support falling from 70 percent in 2009 to 35-40 percent at present. In addition, Dodon said for the Russian television that the exports to the EU fell after the signing of the Association Agreement and after the EU said it opened its market for Moldovan products. "We should have an understanding with Russia on at least two issues - we have to address the issue of exports so that Moldovan products return to the Russian market. To this end,

most probably, we'll have to carry out negotiations in a tripartite format - Russia, the EU, and Moldova. The second problem is that of the migrants. In Russia there are approximately 800 thousand Moldovans, of which hundreds of thousands have problems with the migration regime or were expelled. That's why we need to sign an agreement on migration. And I hope we will solve this problem. This is what we want from Russia – give us the rod and we will catch the fish by ourselves. We don't need grants and loans, we need just conditions to be able to work."

Igor Dodon stressed that the presidential elections are only an intermediate stage as long as in the Parliament "there is a pro-European majority." "We need to obtain early elections in order to change entirely the power."

Dodon suggested that his pro-Russian orientation will be difficult to promote because of the position of Moldova's neighbors. "I understand very well that we have Ukraine on one side, and Romania- on the other. The latter is a NATO member. One cannot choose his/her neighbors and we'll need to establish good relations with them."

At the insistence of the moderator to formulate his clear position on Crimea, Dodon reiterated his statement made in the election campaign that raised reactions of disapproval in Kiev: "I said openly: I consider that, de facto, Crimea is Russian, with an unrecognized status by the West at this stage."

Regarding the Transnistrian issue, Igor Dodon said he sees real solutions and expressed hope that early next year, after the Transnistrian elections in December, "we will sit at the negotiating table and will outline a political settlement for this problem." "I have always said it openly - I believe that the solution to this problem is the federal organization of the state. If someone does not like the "federalization" word, find another term, but there is no other solution. This is going to be decided not by the president Dodon, but by the Moldovan people through referendum. We should act in this direction," said Igor Dodon.

In an interview for the TV channel *Zvezda*, the Socialists' leader expressed his personal admiration for the Russian President Vladimir Putin, saying that "he is envying the Russian people for having such a leader" and that he "will be following Putin's example with regard to strengthening patriotism and statehood of the Republic of Moldova". "Part of our society wants unification with Romania, another part wants to join NATO and so on. There is no patriotism like in Russia. I really want to do something like this for our country, so that people take pride in their country", said Igor Dodon.

Ion Sturza: The presidential elections haven't brought about social peace, change and stability that the Republic of Moldova needs so much



Former Moldovan Prime Minister, Ion Sturza, now a businessman, says the presidential elections have split a lot the Moldovan society causing a lot of tension in the public space, and is wondering how Igor Dodon will manage the relations with the neighbours - Romania and Ukraine- whom he has attacked severely in the campaign. He believes that in 2017 Moldova is going to face new elections – early parliamentary elections.

■ **Lina Grău:** What conclusions have you drawn after these elections? What are the important things that should be pointed out beyond the outcome that was to some extent predictable?

■ **Ion Sturza:** First of all, I don't think the results of these elections were predictable, because Maia Sandu's score, arithmetically speaking, was well above the expectations of the analysts and observers of the electoral process in Moldova. Sandu's result is a very positive factor, which demonstrates that a considerable part of the Moldovan society, though

not the majority, is thinking differently than considered. This is not only about geopolitical criteria - Maia Sandu's message was not geopolitical, it was anti-oligarchic, anti-poverty, and anti-lies.

This is a very positive thing that a movement has been coagulated in the Moldovan society which cannot be disregarded.

On the other hand, one thing that upset me most was the quality of these elections in terms of the message delivered to the society - a degrading message. Largely it was initiated by the candidate Dodon, but unfortunately, later also Maia Sandu was drawn into this trap. This has affected her image a bit and some people didn't even vote for her in the runoff.

The phenomenon generated by Maia Sandu is a very good platform for the future. I do not know to what extent the pro-European right or center-right candidate will have the tenacity, resources and desire to continue the political struggle. And I do not know to what extent other leaders from the same segment, particularly Andrei Nastase, will continue to support Sandu. What is clear is that both Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu will try to anticipate the parliamentary elections in order to capitalize on this electoral score.

The involvement of the Orthodox Metropolitan Church in Moldova was regrettable. The church is no longer authority for many Moldovans. Of course, these elections had an international echo and are part of the series of changes that some consider tectonic- started by Brexit, continued by the election of Trump, and the elections

in our region - Bulgaria, reconfiguration of the Estonian Government, the statements of the Hungarian prime minister ... So, the external interest in our elections was rather high, keeping us in one form or another in the international information space.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What is going to happen next? Igor Dodon made bellicose declarations regarding the European Union, the Association Agreement. On the other hand, he also spoke about the federalization of Moldova and one of the concerns is that he could try a quick solution for Transnistria so that Moldova is maintained in the area of influence of the Russian Federation for many years ahead.

■ **Ion Sturza:** Normally, the election rhetoric has its own specifics – it doesn't necessarily transform into action when in office. At least, this is the hope in the Republic of Moldova. The specifics of the situation is that Igor Dodon has a very narrow field for manoeuvre. He is a Kremlin project- he is financed from there and receives direct or indirect indications. We could also see that Dodon has a duplicitous message - one is for the Russian media and we saw that in *the Kommersant* interview in the election campaign, and another - for the internal audience and the West.

We'll see to what extent he will be free to act independently of Moscow or will be able to justify certain concessions in the domestic and foreign policy. But what matters at the moment for Russia is Moldova's position in relation to the Association Agreement, at least a neutral position with regard to Crimea and what is happening in Eastern Ukraine, and the last but not least, a solution suitable for Moscow in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. I think these are the basic home tasks that Igor Dodon received.

The extent to which he will be able to achieve the above-mentioned depends greatly on Plahotniuc. I think it is already a banality to say that he is the one who

actually makes the decisions. By the way, he is the one who will decide eventually whether this election will be validated or not, as there are still open questions as to the way the elections were organised. Plahotniuc made strong commitments to the European and Romanian partners that the situation in Moldova will not degrade.

And another factor is that Dodon should understand that 50 percent of voters will not easily accept a dramatic change in the domestic and foreign policy orientation towards Europe.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Regarding Maia Sandu, what do you think are her prospects as a political project and option for changing the political class in Moldova? Her emphasis on fairness and combating corruption – do you think there is a potential to advance on these issues under the current conditions?

■ **Ion Sturza:** Yes, she is a phenomenon. I'd like to distinguish between Maia Sandu as phenomenon and Maia Sandu as individual or budding politician. Maia Sandu- the politician should take care of this phenomenon and be very cautious not to discredit it when she appears in public. There have been several quite tense moments in this campaign and especially in the debates. Some supporters of the Maia Sandu as phenomenon were disappointed by Maia Sandu -the politician.

I sincerely believe that Moldova needs a radical change in the political class. It needs new people in politics. The transition should be done in a natural way and combining what is already existing on the political scene with new things to come. Is Maia Sandu able to do that? I think, yes. She has shown great courage and determination. Only she needs to get back to what is called politics - with all its elements - resources, people, and strategies. There is need for a more consistent basis in the political business which in combination with a more romantic message- anti-system- can produce the expected results.

■ **Lina Grâu:** One of the surprises of the first round of elections was that over 90 percent of the votes have been given to the parties that are not in government. What signal does this send? Are we witnessing a change in the political parties? The Communist Party seems to have been replaced by Igor Dodon's Socialist Party and Renato Usatii's Our Party; PLDM and PL- by Maia Sandu's and Andrei Nastase's political formations. Even PDM had a poor score. What is actually happening on the political scene?

■ **Ion Sturza:** The main message is that there is a desire to change the corrupt political class. People want to erase the politicians who stole the billion and who caused poverty and disaster in Moldova. This refers to the center-right parties: look at the millions of Euros invested by the Democratic Party, but the score remains marginal, while others have just no chance.

That's the problem – we may move towards elections, perhaps even early elections, but we do not have actually parties that we can count on. We have the Socialist Party on the left-wing that may still have several satellites. And on the right-wing side, I'd be surprised if a coalition or a large party that could win the elections was possible to create. In these conditions, the entire power could pass into the hands of the Socialists, who in that case will have not just slogans, but also instruments to change Moldova and its political orientation.

Unfortunately, we are still playing by the rules imposed to us by Plahotniuc. I said it from the outset that these presidential elections are a trap and a fake target that split the society and the political class, diverting the attention from the real task that we had to insist upon – the change of the kleptocratic regime. We will see what's being prepared for us by Plahotniuc's strategists, but certainly something is being arranged.

■ **Lina Grâu:** And what do you think is the

game played by the “shadow man” that everyone’s talking about?

■ **Ion Sturza:** The idea is to keep the status quo, because every day brings profit- not from ticket sales at the Noble Club, but from the energy sector and other schemes. And that profit is quite substantial. This system will anyway collapse and break at some point, but the longer it stretches in time, the better for Plahotniuc – I know it from the insiders that this is the principle: each day is bringing profit. And nobody cares about the fact that one day the country and millions of people will get disappointed, sliding into poverty - that’s already another issue that does not really interest the strategists of the Noble Club.

■ **Lina Grău:** How do you explain the big difference in the voting by the diaspora and the mood within the country?

■ **Ion Sturza:** Now there is a very dangerous discussion involving the people in the country and those living outside the country - angry and venomous mutual accusations like “you left,” “but you are stupid” - and this is not good for anyone. This is very dangerous.

Dodon’s and Sandu’s voters are coupled to a much broader information space, not just Moldovan. Igor Dodon’s voters have an intermediary which is the Russian press and which is brought in Moldova by the pro-Europeans oligarchs. The voters in the West have no longer Russian intermediaries and they see things and phenomena differently -they see how the society is getting involved in their countries, including the civil society, and they become citizens of the world with different instincts. The mobilization of the Moldovan diaspora was formidable and well above expectations.

But let’s not be upset and insist that only we are right. I think that those more than 800 thousand people who voted for Dodon are also right and we need to understand why they voted for Dodon. Is it just a

geopolitical option or there are other reasons?

That is the challenge that I don’t know how the politicians from Chisinau are going to manage.

■ **Lina Grău:** We’ve seen Igor Dodon’s pretty rough position in relation to Ukraine and also the Ukrainian Ambassador having been summoned to Kiev for consultations. It is foreseeable that also the relations with Romania are not going to develop positively? How do you see the relations with neighbours?

■ **Ion Sturza:** Dodon’s statements about Ukraine were a major blunder, even if he had to tick something for the Russian Federation. But even if it is an extremely sensitive issue for Ukraine, the Ukrainian President was quite conciliatory and said he is ready to work with Moldova if the Moldovan government is going to stay firm on the European positions.

But Dodon’s statements remained deeply in the minds of Ukrainians and they shall punish Dodon for this. In addition, we could find ourselves in a situation when the Russian Federation makes some temporary economic concessions, but Moldova will not have accesses to the Russian Federation. In addition, Ukraine could torpedo any attempt to resolve the conflict.

As far as Romania is concerned, the situation is rather sad. It’s a variant that Bucharest has not considered even in the worst scenarios, although it was looming. The public opinion is outraged that the President of the Republic of Moldova is a Romanophobic and a person who has consciously and in a very primitive way attacked Romania, the Romanians and the Romanian ideals. It is, however, surprising that someone who was preparing for such a responsible position was so vehemently opposing a neighbour of the Republic of Moldova on which the latter depends entirely today. The reaction of the official

circles in Bucharest is quite reserved – they have their internal issues there, including parliamentary elections. But, I think, Dodon will have the doors closed in the Bucharest political offices.

We are in a very delicate situation. You can run away wherever you want in terms of geostrategy, but you cannot escape geography. Our neighbouring partners are outraged and upset and this could have serious repercussions on the situation in Moldova. How is Dodon going to fix this up? Let’s wait and see.

■ **Lina Grău:** In conclusion, what are these elections going to bring about for the Republic of Moldova?

■ **Ion Sturza:** Unfortunately, they are not bringing social peace, changes, stability that Moldova needs so much. They are not bringing certainty in our foreign relations, while in the relations with Ukraine and Romania the things are becoming even bellicose. Take into account the fact that also the USA is in uncertainty that we couldn’t imagine a few days ago. So, the situation is bringing many uncertainties.

But the most important today is to calm down, to accept one another, to accept the mistakes and victories of the election campaign and to position ourselves for future battles, but in a peaceful way.

■ **Lina Grău:** Do you think these elections have been sort of preview of the 2018 parliamentary elections?

■ **Ion Sturza:** I still think we are going to have early elections in 2017.

■ **Lina Grău:** So you think we are going to have early parliamentary elections?

■ **Ion Sturza:** This presidential exercise wouldn’t make sense if it was not linked to the elections that really matter - and not in 2018 or 2019 when they should normally take place, but much quicker.

Pavel Postică: It is up to the Constitutional Court to take the final decision as to the fairness of the elections

Promo-Lex Association organized an observers' mission present at almost all polling stations in Moldova and partially abroad. The mission's mandate included monitoring of the electoral campaign. The head of the observers' mission, Pavel Postică is talking about the main conclusions after the second round of elections.

■ **Pavel Postică:** In the second round we've noticed several negative aspects of the electoral process that came out of the common picture in the country.

First, there was organized massive transportation of voters to certain polling stations. This is about the polling stations for the citizens residing in Transnistria and Gagauz autonomy.

Another aspect has to do with the counting. Our observers have noted that in more than 200 polling stations the counting procedure of ballots was violated. More people were involved in the process contrary to the regulations of the Central Election Commission according to which only one electoral official submits all ballots so that only one person can touch the ballots, while the others can just watch.

The situation at the polling stations abroad was obvious – at some polling stations there were not enough ballots or they were at the limit, endless queues, and a large part of voters were unable to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

Another aspect that was noted in the first election round but also in other



elections was photographing of the ballot papers.

Cumulatively, the organized transportation, photographing of ballot papers, the records of the persons who were transported and who photographed the ballot papers and the ID with the “voted” stamp - all these things make us think that this organized transportation was not accidental and that it was done in a centralized way. The openness showed by the secessionist administration makes us believe that there was an understanding between the administration and one of the candidates.

■ **Lina Grău:** Mr Postică, you have been working for Promo-Lex for a long time and have dealt continuously with the elections in the region. Have there been previous cases when the Transnistrian residents came massively to vote? And what happened before when people from the left bank tried to come to

the polling stations, especially with organized transport?

■ **Pavel Postică:** Despite the fact that in the previous elections the Transnistrian voters also had a great desire to participate in the Moldovan political processes, each time they were blocked and created artificial impediments at the customs border control units of the Transnistrian administration. The cars were searched and long queues formed at the checkpoints so that many people gave up and returned home. For this reason the number of Transnistrian people participating in the Moldovan previous elections was quite small.

Now, on the contrary, we've seen a tacit openness of the Transnistrian administration. We have information that certain institutions in the region received instructions to send their employees to vote. The latter had to prove they had voted by presenting their ID cards with the “voted” stamp.

I hope this door will remain open and that the Moldovan citizens residing in the Transnistrian region will no longer be obliged to vote, but will be able to vote in an informed and conscious way.

■ **Lina Grău:** The Constitutional Court has not validated the elections yet. They are waiting for all disputes and claims to be clarified, including those coming from the diaspora. Since the difference between the two candidates was not very big, what is your conclusion as head of the observers' mission- could these violations influence the outcome of these elections in a decisive way?

■ **Pavel Postică:** I do not think the violations observed by the Promo-Lex observers during the election day were in a position to change the outcome as this difference of 70 thou votes is quite big. You can win even having one vote more than your counter candidate.

However, most violations which apparently determined the electoral score could be caused by the irregularities admitted during the election campaign by all candidates involved in the election race - irregularities having to do with the financing of the campaign, the dirty electoral technologies, the black PR, discrediting of the counter-candidates. And I believe that these technologies have influenced a lot the electoral results.

■ **Lina Grău:** What is your conclusion about these elections? Have they been free and fair?

■ **Pavel Postică:** We've never had in Moldova absolutely free and fair elections and we cannot say this is possible as long as we witness certain violations. The final assessment as to how legal these elections were will be made by the Constitutional Court.

For comparison, in Austria, this year's presidential elections were invalidated by the Constitutional Court of Austria for purely technical breach of the vote counting procedure. In Ukraine, each counting protocol that contains at least one error, be it spelling mistake, is returned to the constituency and is not accepted until the mistakes are corrected.

In our case we have to decide for ourselves - we as society and the judges as representatives of the institutions that have to take the decision - if these violations, altogether, in one way or another, can lead to the invalidation of the elections. I cannot have a categorical answer to that as it is not my role to give one. We, as observers, have tried to explain and show to the society what we have seen. Now it's up to the relevant authorities to make the final assessment.

Petru Macovei: The elections were not fair in terms of candidates' access to media sources



The executive director of the Independent Press Association (API), Petru Macovei, says that in the electoral campaign, mass media, especially the television stations affiliated to political forces have acted rather as propaganda agents than as sources of information and that in the media one can observe the same antagonism as in the society. API together with the Center for Independent Journalism monitored the media coverage of the election campaign and presented regular reports on this subject.

■ **Lina Grău:** What are the most obvious things about this campaign?

■ **Petru Macovei:** Two things should be mentioned- the access to mass

media of the competitors of this campaign and the access of citizens, consumers of media, to the objective information and how much the press helped citizens to make an informed choice.

Unfortunately, on both segments there have been violations. I am convinced that the election campaign and the elections in general were not at all fair in terms of access of candidates to media sources.

Let me give you some examples. The first is the organization of debates. There is a regulation on the election campaign and the law says that national broadcasters are obliged to conduct debates. The broadcasters with national coverage are *Moldova 1, Prime, Channel 2, and Publika*. The television stations controlled by Pahotniuc didn't organize debates in the evening prime-time hours when everyone is watching TV. Some of them have simulated debates in the morning, at around 6-7 am, when people are not watching TV. So the intention of part of the media to flaw the electoral process by not giving access to the candidates to present their programmes so that people can make a conscious choice is absolutely clear.

Another example- the legislation says that the electoral competitors have the right to a certain number of minutes free of charge to present their programmes. Nobody cared about this provision.



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If we go on analysing the performance of the main television companies, it is absolutely clear that the trust controlled by Plahotniuc deliberately limited the access of candidates that were not supported by the Democratic Party - in the first round there were several such candidates and in the second round they limited the access to Maia Sandu.

Regarding the professionalism with which journalists have covered this campaign, in my opinion, this campaign has been, by far, the worst media campaign. All the time when we engage in monitoring projects, we think it cannot be worse. This campaign has demonstrated how bad it can be and how many ugly things journalists can do, how low they can fall in their attempt to serve the interests of the employer and not that of the public.

These TV stations have propagated lies without mentioning the source of information, based on speculations of absolutely unreliable publications or blogs. Later, when it was proved those were lies, the latter have not been denied, thus people remained with false information.

Altogether, these have led to the result of the elections that was not even remotely conscious.

The press in our country contributes greatly to stereotyping of the citizens' mentality. And if before we were complaining that we have citizens

with a discriminatory attitude towards women or single women without children, this campaign has served as an additional platform of sexist and discriminatory statements for bad-intentioned persons and media institutions.

So from both viewpoints, this election campaign has been a test failed by both the media and the Broadcasting Coordinating Council (CCA). In a press conference, we have demanded the resignation of the CCA President and its members who are directly responsible and guilty for the fact that the law was not applied.

■ **Lina Grâu:** You have monitored both election rounds – has anything changed in the behaviour of the media in the second round?

■ **Petru Macovei:** All lies about Maia Sandu in this election campaign have been easily taken over by various TV stations belonging to Plahotniuc's media trust. Let's take, for example, the lie about the 30 thousand Syrians. They didn't even get back to apologize to the hundreds of thousands of media consumers who had been deceived. Let's remember the "news" about icons in schools, or unification with Romania and others. The opponent of the Socialist Party, Igor Dodon, has used these lies extensively in leaflets distributed by his party, including on the left bank, which contributed to his victory in elections. These lies have been easily accepted by television companies that have commented instead of

checking them as journalists in good faith should do.

Unfortunately, many journalists in this campaign have deliberately chosen to serve the party interests. And I'm sorry for our profession to see how it is discrediting itself.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What are your expectations for the post-election period, how do you think things will evolve in terms of press freedom and journalistic fairness?

■ **Petru Macovei:** I think it will continue the same way – the media controlled by the Democratic Party will continue to create and reflect parallel realities of this country. Another part of the media, which is supporting the opposition and is not always following strict ethical methods, will continue to do the same.

I hope the few independent media institutions will resist as in the conditions of a very aggressive informational war between the two camps, they use dishonest methods, capturing new and new redoubts. In the face of enormous amounts of money invested in informational campaigns of propaganda and manipulation, it will be difficult to survive, especially given the conditions in our country and poverty that are reflected in the welfare of journalists and editorial staffs.

In my opinion, this war will continue and I see no prospects in the near future that things will change.

Veronica Crețu: Depriving thousands of people in the diaspora of the right to vote is a serious violation

Veronica Crețu, president of the Open Government Institute from Chisinau, said that through the irregularities admitted in these elections, Chisinau breached the principles of the Agenda for Open Government signed in 2011 that provides for the participation of citizens in democratic processes of the country.

■ **Veronica Crețu:** Moldova joined the Agenda for Open Government in 2011 and has made a number of commitments: to ensure transparency at all levels, to involve citizens in decision making processes, innovate public sector through technological tools and work for social responsibility, for example, consult and inform citizens about the reactions to their complaints. Roughly, this means being respectful of citizens.

If you look at what happened in these elections, we can note with regret that we didn't even deserve to be part of this Agenda for Open Government. Take the simplest example - that of ensuring the Moldovan citizens living abroad with ballot papers. Participatory democracy means open government and the elections is the implementation in a direct way of the representative democracy. We talk about participatory democracy and we deprived our citizens of the right to vote by not offering them an essential thing for that – ballot papers. The basis of democracy is the vote and when this right is limited it strikes me as a serious violation. This is a constitutional right that has been violated in the case of thousands of citizens.



When they saw such an intense mobilization in the second round, the authorities had to take action in order to ensure the right to vote for everyone. If the government did not have the ability to forecast and find immediate solutions, it means that the Agenda for Open Government was just a simulation of participatory democracy which de facto does not exist in the Republic Moldova.

■ **Lina Grău:** What were the other annoying things in this election?

■ **Veronica Crețu:** What irritated most was the way some candidates communicated using negative and aggressive language. I have not seen but insults and unfortunately, the one who used such language, eventually, managed to persuade the voters and obtain the highest percentage.

Another annoying thing was that the candidates didn't use numbers

and statistics. The electoral message was not rooted in evidence and numbers – for example, if we invest here, how the business environment or the social dimension will improve or how the poverty will reduce etc. That would give citizens the opportunity to make an informed choice. But the information was presented in a way that could easily be manipulated. That was really annoying.

■ **Lina Grău:** How do you see things evolving in the near future?

■ **Veronica Crețu:** I'm sure that what happened will affect quite negatively the image of the country abroad. It will be much harder to convince at the level of global platforms of the very good reforms or innovations that we have in the government – for example, the e-transformation agenda of the government. We have invested a lot of resources in digitizing public services and providing access to data... The biggest challenge now would be to maintain at least what was achieved.

Perhaps, the civil society organizations should be united and have a unique strategy for future development – given the challenge of the pro-Russian orientation, to continue the reforms for a greater impact.

In the previous years we had a National Council for Participation, whose activity hasn't been relaunched. It would be important that the Government continue to consult the civil society.

Unfortunately, after the announcement of preliminary election results, I heard several colleagues of mine saying they don't want to stay any longer in Moldova. And it will be regrettable if people will leave the country in the near future. For many people this election was like a signal - if the pro-Russian president wins they will leave the country. So we will see a pretty intense wave of emigration, including people that could generate content and could engage in the development agenda.

■ **Lina Grâu:** In conclusion, how does the Republic of Moldova and the society look like after these elections?

■ **Veronica Crețu:** It is still much divided and this division was further emphasized. The way Transnistria and Gagauzia were used and how the candidates worked with the people as a whole, has shown once again how divided Moldovan people and society are. In order to bridge this division, one needs visionary political leaders. In Moldova, we don't have schools for training leaders and citizens who would be able to make informed decisions, think critically and be able to distinguish between truth and lies.

So Moldova will remain a sensitive region and the more divided we will be, the weaker we will become in terms of security, economy, and other aspects. We have no leverage to consolidate ourselves. So we have a weak and deeply divided society and I know of no miracles that could revive this territory.

What I'm afraid most is that this weakness of the country may cause violence and reprisal against those who freely express their position towards the government or the president, or the colleagues in the mass media.

Victor Chirilă: We will be seen again by international actors as a very unreliable partner



Victor Chirila, the executive director of the Foreign Policy Association said the Moldovan foreign policy re-enters a grey area it has been previously, during the Communist rule - when there is a double rhetoric, with different messages for the West and Russia, and when the country had the reputation on an unreliable partner.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What is going to be the impact on the foreign policy of the option made by the Moldovan citizens in these elections?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** Unfortunately, I disagree with those who say that the election of Mr Dodon as President of the Republic of Moldova will have no impact on the foreign policy. Igor Dodon has several initiatives which, once implemented, will have negative effects on our relations with Romania, for example, and the EU. Also the relations with the Russian Federation are not going to be as good as Mr Dodon imagined himself. His promises will not be easy to achieve, I would even say unachievable as long as he

does not have a majority in Parliament. In these conditions, Russia might be unhappy and we are going to witness again cold relations with Moscow, as it has happened during the communist government.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What commitments are you referring to when you say that Mr Dodon has made promises to Russia? We can witness at present a certain reverence shown by Dodon to Mr Putin personally and to the Russian Federation talking about resuming trade. What are the hidden things?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** One of the promises made to the pro-Russian electorate and the Russian Federation was to renegotiate the Association Agreement, in particular the economic part. He proposes tripartite talks - Russia, the EU, and Moldova. This is impossible, because the EU is not going to accept a third actor get involved in its bilateral relations with Moldova. And even if Moldova insists on it, I do not think this will be easy to achieve, because this creates a negative precedent for other countries.

Another promise is to outlaw the unionist movement. This is, again, a promise that he won't be able to implement without a Parliamentary majority.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Officials in Brussels said in that in their discussion with Mr Dodon, the latter assured that Moldova's European course is not

going to be changed. Do you think we are witnessing a return to the era of double rhetoric at the top of the political power of the Republic of Moldova?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** Yes, for sure. We are getting back to Voronin' rhetoric and this is a *deja vu*. It seems that Mr. Dodon will be going the same way, which does not bode well either for him or for Moldova, because we know very well what happened during Voronin's time- the relations with the Russian Federation were practically frozen and we lost the Russian market. When the communists came to power in 2001, 40 percent of our exports went to the Russian market. When they left power, Moldova was exporting only 20 percent to the Russian market. This duplicitous speech of Dodon, who is deceiving both partners is not going to be beneficial to Moldova and, I think, we will be penalized - either by Russia or the West.

■ **Lina Grău:** Russia and the EU – what does each have to offer to Moldova? Can the Russian Federation replace the assistance provided by the European Union to Moldova? Can it replace the market provided by the EU or can it become an alternative democratic model?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** This is the question that Mr Dodon surely has the right answer to. In a discussion in which I participated he said that even if he thinks the Association Agreement was not welcome for Moldova, the reforms he is going to undertake and implement, including the judiciary reform, will be based on the *acquis communautaire*. He understands very well that the Russian Federation cannot offer us good models for the reforms we want to do in our country – in the justice and social field. That's why

I'm wondering why this duplicitous message?

The Russian Federation cannot replace the European Union. The EU doesn't provide us only enormous budgetary assistance and support to modernize the economic infrastructure, transport etc. EU is also a supplier of patterns of change that have demonstrated their viability and effectiveness in other countries, including Romania, especially when it comes to fighting against corruption.

■ **Lina Grău:** Is there a risk of rapid settlement of the Transnistrian conflict to Moldova's disadvantage and in favour of the interests of the Russian Federation in the region?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** There is a risk of unwitting, hasty and voluntarist solutions. Because, on the one hand, Mr Dodon wants this and as president he will have the necessary means to engage in the negotiations. But also, I fear that some Western partners want some progress, which is welcomed, but they are doing that in haste, disregarding the regional context, which is not conducive, but also many obstacles existing in Moldova. We have a divided society, which is basically not interested in the Transnistrian issue and which is not ready for any compromise that the political settlement will require.

I'm afraid they will try again to promote a solution that was designed by a narrow circle of decision makers and that will not take into consideration the concerns of other important actors in the society. That's where the big risk lies. I believe that on this issue, Mr Dodon and the government should come up with a common realistic and pragmatic position, without rushing ahead into the unknown.

■ **Lina Grău:** Ukraine will probably have a big say also in connection with the Transnistrian problem. In the election campaign we've seen a trenchant reaction of the Ukrainian side in response to Dodon's statement that Crimea *de facto* belongs to the Russian Federation. How do you see the relations with Ukraine in the near future?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** If Mr Dodon insists with this message, I fear he will find it difficult to start a dialogue and discussions with the politicians in Kiev. There will be personal consequences. If he states openly that this territory belongs to the Russian Federation *de facto*, which contravenes the recent international positions according to which Crimea was occupied by Russia, he could be included in the list of undesirable persons in Ukraine. He may also discover that some European leaders refuse to receive him too.

In conclusion, if Mr. Dodon doesn't revise his attitude, he may face a situation that he will be able to discuss only with Mr. Putin and other authoritarian leaders in Europe and Central Asia.

■ **Lina Grău:** Regarding the other neighbour, we've seen during the election campaign that the anti-unification and anti-Romania messages have been fully exploited by Igor Dodon. On the other hand, Romania is an important trading partner. Not long before the elections, Romania offered the first tranche of financial assistance. Are we returning to the glacial relations from the times of Vladimir Voronin?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** Fortunately, Mr Dodon doesn't control all branches of power, as Mr Voronin did – he doesn't have majority in the Parliament nor representatives in the Government.

If Mr Dodon uses anti-Romanian messages, he will be simply ignored by politicians in Bucharest, who will cooperate with the government which is more open and understands that Moldova depends heavily on Romania, its loans and market for its products etc.

So I think the government will try to settle these voluntarist trends of Igor Dodon. I'm afraid it won't be that easy, as every time he makes a thoughtless statement he will have to take an attitude - and this contributes in no way to a predictable and friendly dialogue.

But, again, Mr Dodon is a rational person and I think he will temperate his voluntarist tendencies, which will certainly displease the Russian Federation.

■ **Lina Grău:** How should Brussels relate to Moldova from now on?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** If the Constitutional Court says the elections were democratic and validates the mandate of Igor Dodon, Brussels will have no choice, but to work with the new president. In the past, it had a rather good cooperation with Mr. Dodon in his capacity as minister of economy. And I think Brussels will show openness to Mr Dodon, trying to help him on the right way. I think Mr Dodon will find it difficult to neglect this openness.

So I foresee a very delicate situation for Mr Dodon – he will not be able to juggle Moscow and Brussels forever. If he tries to promote in his capacity as president the internal agenda of the Socialist Party, I think he will not contribute at all to the political stability in the country and neither to the reforms that he, at least declaratively, when he meets with the Western partners, says he will support. He will neither contribute to coherence in foreign policy - be it Moscow,

Brussels or Washington. And finally his presidency will end up very badly for him.

■ **Lina Grău:** In conclusion, how do you see the foreign policy of Moldova in the near future?

■ **Victor Chirilă:** I don't envy the foreign policy in the coming period as what is going to follow is contradictory messages, which will create confusion in Moscow, Kiev, Brussels, Bucharest and Washington. And nothing serious will happen. The serious initiatives for Moldova will be postponed, the openness for Moldova, for example, in Washington - in Congress or the White House - will also be reduced. This refers also to Brussels. Thus the positive effects of foreign policy will be minimal, practically non-existent. So Moldova will be seen again as a very unreliable partner by the main international actors.

The opinions expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) or of the Foreign Policy Association (APE).