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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.

TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. This newsletter is dedicated to the impressions on the year 2016 and how the past year was seen by **Pirkka Tapiola**, the Head of the EU Delegation to the Republic of Moldova, **Nadejda Hriptievski**, programme director at the Legal Resource Centre from Moldova, **Corneliu Ciurea**, political analyst and the historian **Octavian Țicu**.

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



The European Union, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) have provided financial support in the amount of 92 million Euro for the construction of the Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline, which will finalize the connection of the Republic of Moldova to the pipeline system in Romania. EIB and EBRD have provided loans of 41 million each, and the EU has provided a grant in the amount of 10 million euros. The pipeline will be built by the state enterprise "Vestmoldtransgaz". The total cost for the construction of the Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline is estimated at 113 million euros. The first part of the project- the Iasi-Ungheni gas pipeline- was completed in 2014.



The contract with Gazprom for natural gas delivery to the Republic of Moldova was extended by three years, until 2019. The deputy Minister of Economy, Valeriu Triboi, said that in the first quarter of 2016, Moldova has bought gas from Gazprom at the price of 223 dollars per one thousand cubic meters, while the average price for the entire year will be about 190 dollars. The price for the first quarter of the next year will be known until January 15, 2017.



The businessman Vlad Plahotniuc was unanimously elected chairman of the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) at the PDM Congress which took place on December 24th. The Prime Minister, Pavel Filip, was elected first vice chairman of the party.



Friday, December 23rd, the inauguration ceremony of the president-elect, Igor Dodon, took place. The Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Dmitry Rogozin, invited Igor Dodon to pay an official visit to Moscow on January 17th. This will be Dodon's first visit abroad in his capacity as president, after which he will visit Brussels. Igor Dodon was also invited to pay an official visit to Belarus.



At its congress held Sunday, December 18th, the Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) elected the former Prime Minister, Zinaida Greceanii, as chairman of the party, to replace Igor Dodon. The Socialists have also adopted a resolution advocating against many objectives set by the pro-European governments in the last seven years. Among other things, it advocates for the denunciation of the Association Agreement with the EU. In its congress resolution, PSRM says it will "do its best" to obtain parliamentary elections in 2017 and promises not to form coalition with the parties of the current majority.



Vadim Krasnoselskii, the new Transnistrian leader, assured that the negotiations in the 5+2 format will continue. Speaking after his return from his first visit to Moscow in his capacity as leader of Transnistria, Krasnoselskii also said that one of the priorities of Tiraspol will be to strengthen the integrationist economic relations with Russia.



Romania will increase the number of scholarships provided to young people from Moldova until 2019, under a protocol signed by the Romanian ambassador to Chisinau, Daniel Ionita, and the Moldovan Minister of Education, Corina Fusu. Recently, in an interview to the Russian television, the President Igor Dodon qualified Romania's scholarship programme for the young people from Moldova a "Romanization" programme and urged Russia to increase substantially its offer.

The EU Delegation to Chisinau, the World Bank and IMF have opposed the adoption of the Law on the liberalization of capital and fiscal amnesty, voted by the Parliament as a matter of urgency in the first reading on December 16th. In its statement, the IMF writes "the law, in its current form, would jeopardize the measures aimed at fighting against corruption and hamper the fight against the money laundering and fraud." The speaker of Parliament, Andrian Candu, said in an interview for the Radio Free Europe that the Law on fiscal amnesty will be voted in the second reading only after consultations with the external partners.



Pirkka Tapiola: The year 2016 has certainly been not boring

The head of the EU Delegation to the Republic of Moldova, Pirkka Tapiola, is talking about how the year 2016 was in terms of the EU-Moldova relations.



Lina Grău: Ambassador, how do you see the year 2016? It has started with a rather difficult situation - with no government in place, suspended foreign finance, internal problems- and it is finishing with a new president who declared he wants to renegotiate the agreements with the EU.

Pirkka Tapiola: Well, it certainly has not been a boring year, let's start by saying that. Now you mentioned that the relationship between Moldova and the EU was a little bit cautious at the beginning of the year. I think you saw the European Council conclusions from February. You saw a certain amount of

issues that all the EU member states and institutions wanted to put on the table, issues which we thought would need to be addressed for the Republic of Moldova to come closer to the EU. And first and foremost, to go forward and be better able to deliver for the citizens.

Now we saw a certain number of things on the way: first, the roadmap for the priority reform actions and steps towards implementing that roadmap. I have to say that quite a bit was done in terms of adopting new legislation and this is an important thing to be done. We had the IMF programme which was very much linked also to our funding, to the restoration of our funding in an honest and clear-cut deal. We will resume payments which are in the process of being done at the moment, even if I'm absolutely convinced that there will be future conditionality as well for further tranches and implementation of the IMF programme will be an important check there.

So on the way, I could say that we started in a rather complicated situation, but I don't think that the relationship between the EU and the Republic of Moldova was the key question. The relationship between the governance and the population was. The governance should be accountable in any democratic society. There is a lot of trust needs to be put in place- you had demonstrations on the streets, you had other issues.

So I would say we are in a better situation now- the country is slowly taking steps forward. Now one thing which you saw very clearly is that there was a rather big nuance change over the last couple of years in the EU policy towards the Republic of Moldova. There is continuity in what we consider to be the main development

partner and the main supporter. And what hasn't changed is a very strong commitment to the Republic of Moldova- strong commitment from the political leadership of the EU. As a whole, we have an interest in the country developing in the right direction. What has changed is that we take statements not so literally, be they pro-European or anything else, but we only look at actions. We fundamentally focus on actions and this moves me to the question that you asked about the president. Some of his declarations have not necessarily been the most pleasant ones to hear. We also have a track record of working with the politician who is relatively pragmatic. And we are looking forward to listening less to statements and seeing more actions.

Now if we look at 2015 and 2016, which has been the period of the Association Agreement, they have shown that, despite the difficult economic situation, the Moldovan trade to the EU is going very well. The Association Agreement is, in fact, delivering to the Moldovan economy with a right amount of reforms, rule of law, fight against corruption. It can deliver even better- with 64% of trade going to the EU, with very deep cultural and other links between us, with a big amount of the EU support.

I think that if you look at statements, on the one hand, and at the reality which we see, on the other hand, our relations are that deep that dismantling them is not very probable, or practical, or politically or economically beneficial for the country.

Now the third point, and you saw the statement of all EU heads of mission on the human rights situation. I think more attention should be paid here. On the one hand, one sees a certain

progress in terms of reforms, in terms of the IMF programme, but a transition society should be going towards the consolidation of democracy, rule of law. Reforms, on one side, are probably not sufficient and they will not probably get legitimacy in the society. We are not here to tell you how to run your country, we are here to observe and make friendly recommendations. If you look at the statements of the heads of the EU missions, we wanted to draw the attention to the fact that the EU ambassadors are incredibly united and felt a need for this statement on issues related to a perceived selective justice and the media landscape. No specific cases were mentioned, but I think everybody knows what the issues are. Because we really want this country to succeed and go forward on the European track, but that is linked to reforms not just in the economic and financial fields but also in the consolidation of democracy, rule of law and openness of the society, because that is, in fact, what we as EU stand for.

■ **Lina Grâu:** I would like to ask you a rather technical question and that is related to Mr Dodon's statement about a tripartite commission Chisinau-Brussels- Moscow on the renegotiation of certain aspects of the Association Agreement, and specifically those related to trade. Is that possible from the technical point of view?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** I think that things are very clear here- any contractual relations usually have two sides and we have an agreement between the EU and the Republic of Moldova just like the Republic of Moldova has agreements for instance, with Turkey, CIS. None of these agreements, the ones that exist at this moment, are contradictory in any case. But it is important to understand that the Association Agreement is a bilateral

undertaking between the EU and the Republic of Moldova.

■ **Lina Grâu:** The reforms that the EU insists on are the independence of justice and fight against corruption. What is your opinion about these areas? Do you have any open questions here? The authorities have reported progress as to the commitments assumed in these areas.

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** There are several elements in your question. I think that in terms of the legal basis, steps have been taken and nobody doubts that. Then comes the question of the efficiency of the judicial reform and of the fight against corruption. And the reality is on the ground. One hears quite a bit of comments from the civil society organisations which look at issues. And you can see also in the public opinion polls that there is a relatively strong lack of trust in the rule of law institutions. But then comes the issue of the political will. It is important to make that leap from the quantity to quality. When quality is there and when the citizens see that these institutions are really working in their benefit, then I would say that the reforms have taken that qualitative change which I think is badly needed.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Mr Tapiola, could you please comment the recent law on the capital liberalisation and fiscal amnesty that has been voted in the first reading by the parliament. What is your opinion about this law?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** We are still studying this issue. My team and I have seen much analysis and we are in close contact with the international financial institutions –IMF, the World Bank- and with the authorities on this issue.

■ **Lina Grâu:** How do you assess the

internal situation in the Republic of Moldova? Some analysts are of the opinion that a monopolisation of the power by the Democratic Party took place.

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** I don't feel that I'm going to do someone a big service if I started giving a political analysis on the role of one party, so let me answer in a more broad sense. For democracy to work, you need to have a level of playing field for political parties, a level of access of the media, transparency in society, a situation where people know what's happening, for instance, if you have vested economic or other interests, they should be clearly declared. This is what liberal democracy is about. I think it is very important to take the spirit of that rule of law democracy, to take the spirit of what we would, for instance, see as the European model. It's important, for instance, that political parties genuinely be bottom-up organisations, not consolidated around one leader, but that they have internal party democracy. I've always been fascinated with the subject of political parties- do they really manage to represent their membership and interests of the society, because without that there will be issues of distrust in politics and these issues need much attention. In continuation to what we are talking about, let's take the concentration of media and the possibility of open information, the depoliticisation of state institutions – that means public administration reform, that means that the civil servants are paid decent salaries in order for them to be independent from political or any other force.

If you look at the judiciary that clearly functions as an independent judiciary and can be the arbiters in society, I would say that there is an impression

among many that individuals rather than institutions seem to be gaining in prominence in politics, where one would hope that there would be a de-concentration of power. Even if there are some good developments with some institutions, I would not say that this is necessarily a trend we've been observing.

■ **Lina Grâu:** I would like to talk a little bit about the Transnistrian issue. I know your position that the status quo is not regarded as something positive. On the other hand, there exist concerns in the Moldovan society that a solution could be promoted that will affect the viability of the Republic of Moldova. What are your expectations from 2017, in the situation when we have new presidents both in Moldova and Transnistria and when the Russian Federation will try to use these factors in promoting its interests in the region? Are you expecting radical solutions to the Transnistrian issue in 2017- federalisations or any other solution that could jeopardise the viability of the Republic of Moldova?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** I would say that if you look at the resilience of the state and viability of the state, already the existence of the protracted conflict is a problem for the viability of the state and let's be clear about that. This is why again at the Ministerial OSCE conference in Hamburg, the international community has stated that viability is absolutely key in respect of sovereignty and territorial integration of the Republic of Moldova with a functioning special status for Transnistria.

You mentioned interests of the foreign players, certainly they play a role, but I think where one needs to give a bit more reflection is what the real interest of the Republic of Moldova is and

what its vision is. It's clear that in that kind of the vision you will have issues such as what works, what doesn't work, red lines that you don't want to cross, and every side would have red lines. But it's not up to me, even if I may have my own ideas, to say how you try to work towards a solution. I spoke in favour of small steps as they build confidence and they also show the population on the left bank of the Nistru that Chisinau cares, Chisinau finds solutions and that there is a benefit and improvement of life which goes through the reunification of the country. And that you see that there is an openness to that special status, in a manner which gives opportunity, but at the same time, where problems have been carefully thought through, so that the special status makes the Moldovan state more viable, stronger and more resilient. I would like to see that the solutions found are in line with the European standards and values, that they are very much citizens-centred and are looking at how people are benefitting from a solution.

■ **Lina Grâu:** After Moldova has been for a long time the success story of the European Union in which the latter invested so much, what is its place now on the EU priorities' agenda? And the second question, what are your priorities for 2017 in relation to the Republic of Moldova?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** First of all, let me assure you that Moldova's position is very high on the list of priorities, near the top, and that has not been changed. I would say that the adjustment of the policy that we've seen in the last years are honest policies and more conditional in a way, and it shows exactly how much we

care and how important supporting the Republic of Moldova to develop the right path- the European path- is. When we talked about the success story, and I think I also used this term at one stage, it was a time when there were incredibly good strategies on the table, yet to be implemented. Many of them are yet to be implemented still now. There was a very successful negotiation process of the Association Agreement and the reforms which were needed for the visa liberalisation have been done. So there was a lot of good to be said, but I think there was also a bigger element of expectations and the expectations you cannot maintain for ever and you want to see it moved to actions and real work, you want to see reforms take root. We are part of the same family as Moldova is a European country, a country which is at our borders and which is strategically important. Our interest here is very much in line with the EU global strategy, you can see here that our interests and values come together. For us, our interest is that the citizens of the Republic of Moldova live better, have new opportunities. That brings the sustainable stability which we need on our continent. Now many people talk about geopolitics and want to see things in terms of East and West. The European project has redefined geopolitics –our geopolitics is a geopolitics of prosperity, democracy, reform and people having sovereign rights –right to decide for themselves, go to the justice system and get justice. Because that is the geopolitics that brings us success and stability.

If you look at our policy, you see it very clearly that Moldova matters. And when I say Moldova, it's not the territory, it's the people- people matter,

human security matters, opportunities matter. So our policy is calibrated and if you look at the review of the ENP, you see that we don't use 'one size fits all' in general- we have certain things, we have Association Agreements, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. We try to see what the right set of tools in that support is- financial, technical support, advice, projects for people. So I would say Moldova is becoming increasingly important.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What are your priorities for the next year?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** I've just described how we look at Moldova in terms of policy. What I would like to see in 2017 is the shift from quantitative to qualitative reforms and that the country does have the possibility of reforming, going forward and becoming more open, transparent and that it serves the population, that the fight against corruption becomes more and more successful. These are the kinds of elements that we would like to see. I hope that in 2017 Moldova will manage to overcome the polarisation that you have, find that inclusiveness, find that sense of "we".

■ **Lina Grâu:** What would be your special message to the Moldovan people at the end of the year?

■ **Pirkka Tapiola:** I wish you all first of all, a lot of rest over the holidays, but I also wish you much energy and much attention to caring about your society and bringing new foundations on which to develop and take life forward, empower yourselves and grab those opportunities. Living in a modern world requires a lot of hard work and responsibility. And I wish you energy for all of that in 2017.

Nadejda Hriptievschi: The good reforms in the judiciary and anti-corruption are under the risk of being cancelled by the clientelistic decisions of the Parliament

Nadejda Hriptievschi, programme director at the Centre for Legal Resources of Moldova, says the year 2016 has brought positive results in the area of fighting against corruption and the judiciary reforms, but they are risking being compromised by the way the authorities act, which seem to be protecting clientelistic interests.

■ **Lina Grău:** In 2016 the authorities promised many reforms and they even reported as having conducted many reforms. Let's begin with the anti-corruption measures. What do you think are the things that have been really done well and what are the things that you as civil society representative, lawyer, and expert have objections to?

■ **Nadejda Hriptievschi:** The most significant result in the anticorruption area from this year is the adoption of the Law on Prosecution and Laws on specialized prosecution offices, which consolidated the functions and capacity of the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office. This is very important.

But until today, the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office has not been allocated resources yet as the law provides. So the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office remains understaffed. And secondly, the jurisdiction of the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office remains very wide. Thus it deals not only with big, but also with petty corruption which is investigated by the National Anti-Corruption Center under the supervision of the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office.



It is very clear: any institution, no matter how good it is, when overloaded with work, cannot provide quality. Unfortunately, so far, there haven't been any changes in this respect. So, this remains a huge backlog.

Another very important area - an instrument for fighting against corruption - is integrity and everything related to the asset and interest declarations, declarations of conflict of interest, incompatibilities. The big plus here is that finally, in the summer of 2016, the so-called integrity law package was adopted - the Law on the declaration of income and interests and the law through which the national integrity authority was created. Both laws are very good and contain very good provisions, despite certain important aspects that were omitted and some gaps.

But there remains a very big "but". The biggest problem is that until now the National Integrity Agency has not been created yet. For unclear reasons, the contest for selecting civil society representatives for the agency was extended by the Ministry of Justice. Only recently the representative of the Parliament has been selected. I'm still hopeful that by the end of the year the National Integrity Council will be created.

On December 1st, the speaker of the parliament and three MPs from the Democratic Party registered a draft law in the parliament - the so-called Law on capital liberalization and fiscal amnesty. In fact, the civil servants who have not declared their assets until April 2017, if this draft law is adopted, will be exonerated from any responsibility for failure to declare their assets. Moreover, the National Integrity Agency will not even be able to examine the sources of the income.

This draft law is a non-reform and shows a huge inconsistency in the work of the Parliament. You cannot adopt such a progressive integrity law package on which they have worked for so long a time and only in two months to come up with another draft law that simply cuts any progress from the outset. This draft law is just outrageous. This initiative, if promoted as it is now, erases all progress. And in fact, it shows that those who promote it and those who will vote for such an initiative, not only don't want to fight against corruption, but are promoting corrupt

people and those who haven't fulfilled their legal obligations of declaring their assets as they should have done until now. Therefore it is hard to talk about progress when you see such setbacks.

And last, which I think is important – the way the Prosecutor General was elected and the fact that he didn't mention how he had acquired his assets or how he could afford to buy a house from a prosecutor's salary. Perhaps, he is going to provide explanations on that later.

■ **Lina Grău:** Regarding the justice reform, this is a commitment of the Republic of Moldova towards the EU. This reform has been supported with huge European funds. How does this reform look in 2016?

■ **Nadejda Hriptievski:** In 2016, in the area of judicial reform several laws have been adopted, but we cannot say that any of these acts is a great breakthrough because all they are rather at the project level.

I refer here to the draft amendment of the Constitution, because this is the key in the justice reform. The Constitution should be amended and there is also the favourable opinion of the Constitutional Court in this sense. Several laws were promoted which raise big question marks. For example, the project related to the introduction of mandatory mediation by judges. On the one hand, we are fighting against the overload with work of judges, and suddenly, the Parliament comes up with such a legal initiative. It's absolutely unclear what it is about.

Also at the level of the Superior Council of Magistracy (CSM), there was a regulation on the access to the courts, which confused the audience. I appreciate that CSM has suspended this regulation and I'm waiting to see how it will be changed.

Also regarding the justice system, unfortunately, there have been cases which raised enormous doubts about the impartiality of CSM, the Supreme Court of Justice and, above all, the separation of criminal justice from the political factor. I refer here to the criminal actions taken against the judge Manole for a simple interpretation of the law. This raises a lot of questions. I think, in this case, this was a modality of intimidating the judge. It's an extremely dangerous issue for the entire judicial system.

Also, this year we've seen another case which raised questions, and namely the arrest of the 15 judges. The positive side is that, finally, something has been done, because everyone knew about those orders. But I was shocked that all judges, regardless of personal circumstances and health condition, were placed in custody. Unfortunately, one of the judges died in custody. The arrest itself looked like a show for the media and it happened very close to the electoral campaign ... This raises lots of questions, especially towards the Superior Council of Magistracy which knew about those ordinances in 2012, then in 2014, when the Supreme Court of Justice informed of the case, however, some of the judges who were arrested have even been promoted.

So this indicates upon a systemic failure in the justice sector and, I believe, we must all ask ourselves: what happened? Why instead of having good results since 2011 onwards, we have worse and worse results in this sector?

■ **Lina Grău:** You've also mentioned there is a decreasing trust in the justice sector by the population.

■ **Nadejda Hriptievski:** Yes, unfortunately, according to the Public Opinion Barometer, in November 2011, about 75 percent of people mentioned they did not trust the Moldovan justice,

while in October 2016 - 89.6 percent. It is a very alarming indicator. Something is wrong, something is not done properly and, I think, it is very important that the judiciary finally recognizes the problems and take actions. And one of the main measures is to promote people of integrity within the system. It is not fair to promote people who have problems of integrity, which is a very bad signal transmitted to the society.

■ **Lina Grău:** Do you see any light at the end of the tunnel?

■ **Nadejda Hriptievski:** I'm obliged to see the light. I still believe that there are enough honest and correct judges in the justice system and it is very important that their voice be heard. I still hope that the rules for the selection and promotion of judges will be reviewed so that those who really deserve and those who are honest are promoted.

And I very much hope that the new institution that will be created - the National Integrity Agency- will start working and clean up the public system.

And last but not least, I still hope that the Parliament will not adopt the so-called Law on capital liberalization and fiscal amnesty. I hope the people will realize that, in fact, if we continue this way, we will determine the correct and honest people to leave the country.

External pressure is very important and I hope that it matters. We are actually lucky to have honest and serious development partners who always react promptly. It remains to be seen if our decision makers will react.

And then, there is no eternal political elite. We are having elections in two years and, if the politicians are not thinking about tomorrow, they should know they will be penalized at the next elections for that.

Corneliu Ciurea: Moldova cannot but accept its role of buffer zone

The expert Corneliu Ciurea believes the political year 2016 has brought about the consolidation of power on the political scene of the Moldovan Democratic Party (PDM) and believes that the future relationship with the EU, although they will continue, cannot bring the hope of further European integration for Moldova.

Lina Grâu: Many political commentators talk about the year 2016 as one that led to a very high monopolization of power in the political area. Do you share this view? We have witnessed disappearance of big political parties and had presidential elections. How do you see the political year 2016?

Corneliu Ciurea: I think we are witnessing a consolidation of power of the Democratic Party, which, although has no majority in Parliament, has managed, through acceptable means, to strengthen its position and build a parliamentary majority which gave a government that over the last year has managed to stabilize the situation in the country.

These actions stirred reactions from the opposition, which at the beginning of the year was a bit more vibrant. But, given the concessions that were made, primarily the ruling of the Constitutional Court and the presidential elections, these concessions have gradually led to the weakening of the protest movement that has re-joined the normality. And I think, in principle, the opposition complied with this situation, accepting



interaction and opposition under democratic conditions.

Lina Grâu: So what some analysts call 'monopolization' of power, you refer to 'consolidation' of power. There's a bit of a difference of nuance.

Corneliu Ciurea: It's not a difference of nuance, it's a radical difference. There is no monopolization of power in Moldova, given that we cannot at present identify a party or a politician to hold the entire power control in the country. We have the Democratic Party and its leader, Vlad Plahotniuc, who concentrated the power on the basis of democratic and perfectly legal actions. That does not mean monopolization.

Monopolization is an action that has authoritarian principles at the basis. There was no such thing. They played according to democratic rules and they won. So we can use the term 'consolidation', no more, no less.

Lina Grâu: What is happening in general on the political scene in Moldova? We are witnessing the de facto demise of the Communist Party, at least in the political sphere that

matters, and also the disappearance of PLDM. Will there appear other political players on the ground abandoned by the above-mentioned political formations?

Corneliu Ciurea: If in the case of PLDM, we can accept the fact that it's disappearing, with PCRM we are observing a weakening of the party as it still has an audience. What the Communist Party lost was picked up by the Socialist Party - so, there is no vacuum on the left-wing.

As to the right-wing, because of the collapse of PLDM, the gap is visible. Sure, there are two political parties that want to fill this gap- Maia Sandu's and Andrei Nastase's formations. It is not clear yet whether they will succeed, since they suffer from several major flaws. First, they are not parliamentary parties and secondly, the problem of their relationship is not solved yet. So I would agree there is a gap on the right-wing segment.

Lina Grâu: They've talked a lot on the eve of this presidential election that if Igor Dodon wins, there may happen a strengthening of the Social-democratic pole, by attracting the deputies and voters of the Socialist Party towards the Democratic Party. Do you think that is just speculation or these discussions about a social-democratic pole have real ground?

Corneliu Ciurea: I believe that in the medium and long term this is a tempting project for certain center-left politicians from the Democratic



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Party and the Socialist Party, because such a project would create a virtually unbeatable power pole.

This scenario for now is still impossible, because such a move could lead to the weakening of the PDM and PSRM. Such a project should be prepared and it can be accomplished only after some successes that the government must obtain and on a positive and optimistic background, not in the existing situation. So for now I do not think such a thing is possible.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What does the departure of Marian Lupu as head of the Democratic Party mean? Is this the end of an era? What comes next?

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** It's too much of an exaggeration to call it the end of an era. PDM has entered already in summer a process of rebranding. PDM has found the limits of its own growth- they cannot exceed the 20 percent barrier in its current format. For this reason, the pressing issue of rebranding was posed. And obviously a rebranding starts with the leadership. They have replaced the party chairman, who could not fulfil the role of locomotive that pulls up the party.

I think there will be still substantial and radical changes and the party will appear in a different form - not necessarily totally renewed, but with a vertical power more clearly built and with less dissident smaller groups within the party. I think, following the rebranding, the party will solve its main problem that displeases many - that the real leaders are not in the light, but in the shade.

■ **Lina Grâu:** I would like to refer to the relations with the European Union and the development partners. We

have started this year with an almost glacial situation- with a very bad image and suspended funding. Now we are finishing the year with Igor Dodon as president who is saying he would like to review the agreements with the EU.

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** The period of frost between Moldova and its foreign partners has already passed, although some problems remained in the interaction between us and them. Dodon is not necessarily the most important problem. Dodon is a symptom that talks about the fact that Moldova, despite its determination to move on the path of the European integration, will take care to skillfully manage the problem of bi-vectorialism. So Moldova will seek to strengthen its relationship with Russia and here, of course, the European integration process is going to suffer.

For this reason, the European approach is also pragmatic - on the one hand, resuming its aid, but at the same time, tempering its enthusiasm about Moldova, placing it at the end on the waiting line, with no real chances of joining the EU. So Moldova got stuck at the edge of the European world.

I believe that we should accept our fate, considering the situation today in the EU where there is no predisposition for expansion, and strengthen our positions of what we didn't want to be - of buffer zone, a space between two worlds. For now we cannot have the ambition of getting more.

■ **Lina Grâu:** One last point that I wanted to tackle - Transnistria. Igor Dodon said after the presidential elections in Tiraspol won by Vadim Krasnoselskii, that he would like to go to Tiraspol for talks in January. Do you think we can witness in the near future,

in 2017, a solution to the Transnistrian conflict, given that there are a lot of talks about federalization?

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** I don't think so. I think such a scenario has no chances and I don't think Dodon's visits to Tiraspol will bring big results. Precisely the situation in which we find ourselves and that we talked about earlier - the buffer zone - implies effects from both sides - East and West.

Russia will need further means of pressure and even of blackmail on the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria serves this purpose. And we, despite the bi-vectorialism that we will be promoting, will focus on our relationship with the EU and the West.

In these conditions we will not be able to solve the Transnistrian conflict. And all actions our government will undertake in 2017, including the development of the Strategy on the Transnistrian conflict settlement, will be to demonstrate that Moldova sees Transnistria but as part of Moldova and the maximum it can obtain is the status of autonomy.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Even if Russia pushes to promote a favourable solution?

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** Precisely for this reason - Russia's interests collide with a reaction from the West. It was always the case, including in 2003, and it will continue. I don't see yet premises for the situation to change. This can happen only in the event of a collapse of the Western foreign policy in the region. But I do not think this is possible.

Octavian Țicu: 2016 - Republic of Moldova falls into an abyss whose end cannot be seen

Octavian Țicu, historian and member of the Academy of Sciences, says that 2016 marked a departure from the EU for Moldova.

■ **Octavian Țicu:** The 2016 showed Moldova as it is: split into two directions, two massive blocks-political, geopolitical and identity-related.

The appearances showed a promising start to the year, if we think that the attempt of the Democratic Party's leader to become prime minister was reversed. But I think the beginning of this year was somewhat marked by the end of 2015, when the so-called parliamentary majority was cobbled together that paved the way for a diversion from the European integration idea.

The two major political events of 2016 were, of course, the investiture of the Filip government which has identified itself as a pro-European government, a pro-European majority. On the other hand, at the end of the year, a pro-Russian president was elected, who focused entirely during the election campaign on the idea of diversion from the European integration process.

These two poles of power, in fact, will influence Moldova in the next two years, until the 2018 parliamentary elections.



Lina Grău: Some political analysts talk about a monopolization of political power in Moldova based on the political developments in the county. Others who are closer to the Democratic Party are of the opinion that this is actually about consolidation of power through legal methods? What is your opinion about this issue?

■ **Octavian Țicu:** I think this year there have been two fundamental hijackings of statehood in Moldova.

The first hijacking was produced under the trademark of the European integration process, because the way the parliamentary majority was created was fraudulent, unrepresentative and unlawful. The 2014 elections set up a representative

structure of Parliament which was violated by means of corrupting MPs from various parties. Therefore, this is the first thing which shows that the situation is completely different from what it looks like at the first glance.

On the other hand, we must admit that the process of European integration has been compromised in the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the Democratic Party and Plahotniuc are strongly influenced by the decisions coming from Moscow. This certainly can be deduced from the way the current government has supported the pro-Russian candidate and did its utmost to prevent the election of a pro-European candidate in the presidential elections.

Therefore, the current government must assume the entire responsibility for the failure of the European project. Plahotniuc, the Democratic Party, and all who have joined the current government after the 2014 elections are directly responsible for the fact that the president of the Republic of Moldova is anti-European, anti-Romanian and pro-Russian. To a certain extent, if it hadn't been for the complicity of the Democratic Party and its leader, the victory of this candidate wouldn't have been possible.

■ **Lina Grău:** Mr. Țicu, let me play the "devil's advocate" role in this situation and remind you that this year the

financial relations have been resumed with the International Monetary Fund, and the European Union, while the European leaders and ambassadors say they are going to cooperate with Igor Dodon. How do you see the development of relations with the European Union in the current situation?

■ **Octavian Țicu:** I do distinguish between politics and hypocrisy. In my view, it is political to declare that the European Union will have a dialogue with any partner in Moldova, as happened under Vladimir Voronin, and also under Vlad Filat and Vlad Plahotniuc, and Igor Dodon. This rhetoric shows the continuity of European policies.

But we, the citizens of this country, should understand what actually is happening behind these agreements and the alleged political achievements. Because, in reality, we do not see any reforms in the justice system- we see an instrumentalized justice controlled by the government that punishes certain people, while the guilty ones remain at large. The salaries' system is bankrupt, the education system is drifting, and the society is highly fragmented in terms of political options.

Therefore, we must admit that the European integration project that seemed promising since 2009 until 2013 was simply alienated and identified with these people who, ultimately, have compromised the idea of European integration.

We need to see the essence of the Europeans' discourse: it is necessary to continue the dialogue with those who

support the pro-European orientation. The EU keeps up appearances of attachment to the pro-European government, but it is deeply appalled by all the changes taking place in Moldova.

As far as the Democratic Party and Plahotniuc are concerned, the things are clear: they wanted Dodon's victory in the presidential elections, primarily to satisfy the pressure coming from Moscow. Secondly, to present Dodon as a scarecrow in the eyes of the European Union. And thirdly, to prevent the coming to power of a pro-European candidate, such as Maia Sandu or Andrei Nastase.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Mr. Ticu, I would like you to comment on another phenomenon of 2016, when, de facto, several major political parties have disappeared from the political scene of Moldova. I refer to PLDM, the Communist Party and the Liberal Party whose political influence has diminished. What is actually happening on the political scene of Moldova?

■ **Octavian Țicu:** PDM has currently financial and institutional resources, including in the justice sector, that can convince any political group within and outside Parliament to take part in the current government configuration.

The political parties in Moldova are generally oligarchies, office parties that are cobbled together from the desire to win elections, to benefit from access to resources, to gain power and govern and steal as much as possible. So this is the logic of the existence of political parties, as was the case of PLDM, PCRM, and PL that will simply disappear.

The poles of power in the 2018 elections will reconfigure. The Democratic Party will have a strong administrative and governmental support. The Socialist Party will group around Igor Dodon. And there are two opposition parties, which are a phenomenon of 2016. I refer to the Truth and Dignity Platform Party which, in fact, should get the credits for the pressure on the government and the transformations inside the country, including until the presidential elections. The Action and Solidarity Party led by Maia Sandu will probably capture the anti-socialist, anti-Plahotniuc and anti-Dodon votes.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Regarding Transnistria, how do you see things evolving in the Transnistrian settlement given Igor Dodon's strong statements in support of the federalization of Moldova and the fact that the Transnistrian leader has changed. We know that Russia has an interest in maintaining its influence in the region. How do you see the developments in 2017?

■ **Octavian Țicu:** I think that in the nearest future no major things will happen because, after all, things can be changed in the Republic of Moldova if in the next elections Igor Dodon and the Socialist Party gets a parliament majority and can create the government that would begin this final assault on the idea of federalization which remained unfinished by the Russians in 2003.

Currently, based on the constitutional provisions, of course, Igor Dodon cannot do anything. But I mentioned earlier that his language, rhetoric, and statements, including the congratulations addressed to the

pseudo Transnistrian president- this discourse can be, eventually, damaging for Igor Dodon. Because our society, in its essence, is pro-European and such things said by such a high-level person can create many political deadlocks.

These are probably convenient for the current government for which this rhetoric will be important to be presented to the Europeans, but also to the Moldovan citizens who will be influenced by his pro-Russian and anti-Romanian rhetoric, related to the Romanian language, transnistrianization and so on, rather than pressing social

issues, or justice system related issues or issues related to the long-term development of the country.

■ **Lina Grâu:** In conclusion, how do you see the year 2016 for Moldova? Does it still remain in the grey zone of Europe?

■ **Octavian Țicu:** Last year there were certain prerequisites or hopes linked to the way the majority was created by forming the Strelet Government, and the impression was that we remained anchored in the European integration projects, while this year has basically

meant the collapse of the Republic of Moldova into an abyss whose end cannot be seen.

A political crisis caused by protest movements may occur around social issues and the president's statements. Or as a result of these strenuous two years until the 2018 elections, the opposition may consolidate so as, finally, in 2018, be able to create a credible alternative pole to the current government and presidency. But the legacy of this year will be extremely difficult to carry in 2017.

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