

The Newsletter is based on the radio programme broadcast on September 23rd, 2017, produced by the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova in partnership with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). The programme is broadcast on the Moldova Public Radio. The programme is part of the FES/APE "Foreign Policy Dialogues" Project. The content can be reproduced by mentioning the source.

NEWSLETTER

MONTHLY BULLETIN • SEPTEMBER 2017 • NR.7 (137)

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. European messages for the Republic of Moldova. Conclusions formulated by the Head of the EU Delegation to Chisinau, **Pirkka Tapiola**, at the end of his term
2. **Dionis Cenușa**: The pro-European government in Chisinau is directly responsible for the worsening of the dialogue with Brussels
3. **Ștefan Gligor**: The EU will assess the Moldovan authorities exclusively based on the fulfilment of their commitments
4. **Corneliu Ciurea**: The crisis in the relationship with the EU can be improved.

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



Moldova's request for "full withdrawal of foreign troops" from its territory will be discussed at the UN General Assembly in October, informed the Moldovan Foreign Ministry. The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, criticized the Chisinau's initiative, arguing that those who suggested to the Republic of Moldova the idea of evacuating the Russian peacekeepers from the Transnistrian region are setting up a war in the region. The Moldovan foreign ministry denied having demanded the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers, pointing out that the request refers to the contingent of the Russian troops deployed on the left bank of the Nistru River without the consent of Chisinau. President Igor Dodon criticized the government's request, saying it was "dust in the eyes of the Western curators and puppeteers" of the government.



The Tiraspol Supreme Soviet approved the initiative by the Transnistrian separatist leader, Vadim Krasnoselski, to ask the UN Secretary General to grant the status of observer at the United Nations to the unrecognized republic and to set up a permanent working group on the Transnistrian settlement.



The European Union could differentiate its relations with the Eastern Partnership countries according to their degree of rapprochement with the EU and the reforms they have made. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, which have signed Association Agreements, the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament recommends the creation of a so-called "Eastern Partnership Plus", including the prospect of joining the Community customs area, the Schengen area and other European structures. The Council and the European Commission are also recommended to strengthen the civil society in partner countries, increase financial support and cancel the roaming charges between the EU and the Eastern Partnership member states. The document was drafted in view of the Eastern Partnership summit, which will take place in late November in Brussels.



The Moldovan, Georgian and Ukrainian lawmakers have decided to ask the European Parliament for measures to support their European aspirations. According to a press release of the Moldovan Parliament, deputies from the three countries signed a joint statement demanding that their countries be given a roadmap for EU membership.



The Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Linas Linkevičius, has severely criticized the Moldovan government's mistakes during a visit to Chisinau, but said the EU will not abandon Moldova if it is determined to go through reforms. Speaking at a joint press conference with her Moldovan counterpart, Andrei Galbur, the head of the Lithuanian diplomacy condemned the "tolerance or facilitation" by the Moldovan governors of the theft of the billion and said the Moldovan government is going to be judged from now on in Brussels "by deeds, not by slogans". Linkevičius, one of the few senior EU officials that has visited Chisinau lately, said Moldova will receive further assistance from Brussels for the reform implementation if it is determined to continue with the reforms.

European messages for the Republic of Moldova



by Lina Grâu

At the end of his term, the head of the European Union Delegation to Chisinau, Pirkka Tapiola, organized a meeting with the journalists where he made some conclusions.

Speaking about the achievements of the Republic of Moldova in the last four years, during which the country had had a period of "the success story of the Eastern Partnership", Pirkka Tapiola mentioned the liberalization of the visa regime that allowed the Moldovan citizens to travel to the European countries, the signing of the Association Agreement and the creation of the Free Trade Area, which has led to increased

exports to the EU. The relationship between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union has become much deeper during this period, said the head of the EU Delegation.

From a historical perspective, it was a very difficult time for the Republic of Moldova in its attempt to get closer to the EU, but maybe it didn't move sufficiently enough in the areas of good governance and the rule of law, said the diplomat.

Referring to his regrets after his four-year term in the Republic of Moldova, Pirkka Tapiola said he hoped the reforms would advance more quickly and that no one expected a theft of such a

magnitude in the banking sector. In addition, the EU had to take tough decisions on the suspension of financing for the Republic of Moldova, decisions taken together with the World Bank and Romania. At present, even if it supports the Republic of Moldova with money, the EU is doing it on separate projects that have begun before and where the suspension would be worse than the continuation. "I hope the EU will be able to return to budget support sometime for Moldova", concluded Pirkka Tapiola. Another aspect that could have developed better is the Transnistrian settlement.

Pirkka Tapiola: Of course I hoped to see more progress in the Transnistrian settlement process. I'm very glad that a trade facilitation arrangement was found which did not put a customs border in the middle of the Republic of Moldova, but in a way took Transnistria into the DCFTA. Over 60% of the Transnistrian exports abroad go to the EU as well as the exports from the other side of the Republic of Moldova.

Leaving politics aside, the cost of non-reintegration is big for both banks. But here you need of course political will from all sides. We've tried to find solutions and we'll continue doing that in the future as well. But of course,

the attractiveness game belongs to the side of the Republic of Moldova, because in this kind of situations that always counts a lot.

The Head of the EU Delegation said he was proud that during his term of office, the Gagauzian autonomy was given the first direct European funding and that he advocated that the autonomy be given realistically all the attributions promised by Chisinau in the early 1990s.

Another regret of Pirkka Tapiola relates to the insufficient freedom of the press in the Republic of Moldova:

Pirkka Tapiola: I'd like to see more independent media at such meetings. It is very difficult as the Moldovan media market isn't very good and large enough to be competitive or make an independent business out of media. I understand that. And of course we follow these issues. And one of the issues my team has been working on is to follow how the next Audio-visual Code will look like.

The Head of the EU Delegation also called for unity between the society and the Moldovan political class, saying that emphasis should be

placed on subjects that unite people and get them together, not on ones that divide them.

Asked whether he is pleased with the progress in the justice sector, Tapiola said that "the EU assessment on this is still not ready, but it may not be the most positive one."

The diplomat criticized the authorities' initiative to limit participation in the political life of externally funded NGOs. "The interests of the EU is to have vibrant civil societies at the eastern border," said Pirkka Tapiola.

Pirkka Tapiola: It's not something that it would be nice to be, but something obligatory as this is about shared values. We've been concerned about the Russian NGOs' laws and we are following strictly what's happening in Moldova in this regard.

Since September, the EU will have another ambassador to the Republic of Moldova- Peter Michalko- a Slovak diplomat familiar with the situation and politicians in Chisinau. He worked previously for the European Union Monitoring Mission on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border (EUBAM) and is former advisor to one of Tapiola's predecessors, Kalman Mizsei.

Dionis Cenușa: The pro-European government in Chisinau is directly responsible for the worsening of the dialogue with Brussels

The first interlocutor with whom we are analysing the messages coming from Brussels and the European prospects of the Republic of Moldova is Dionis Cenușa, analyst working for the Expert-Grup Analytical Center in Chisinau. He is signalling that the situation created around the Republic of Moldova is very sensitive for the EU, which has to take not only technical decision, but also political ones- to provide the financial assistance to Chisinau or to postpone it.

Lina Grâu: What do you think about the messages for Moldova coming from the West? The head of the EU Delegation to Chisinau, Pirkka Tapiola, finished his term and made some conclusions at the end. Which of the



messages are the most important in your opinion?

Dionis Cenușa: The messages were objective and partly harsh, and they referred, first of all, to the quality of the Moldovan politics. Among the main messages I have noted, I could mention the problems of politicized institutions, the struggle for political power and the inability of the political class to play according to democratic rules, so that the transition from one power to another is based on the rules of democracy. And this is about fair and free elections. At the same time, the messages of the Western diplomats referred to the quality of the reforms that are not in line with the expectations of the European partners. Very often there are talks about reforms that are written on paper but which have no effect in practice.

Lina Grâu: One of the hot topics of the last period was the discussion about the uninominal election system and the adoption of the mixed electoral system. How do you see the development of the relationship with the European Union after this change of the electoral legislation? And what are the prospects of the European funding? We know

that the granting of the 100 million euros by the EU was to a certain extent conditional on the non-amendment of the electoral legislation.

Dionis Cenușa: Ambassador Pirkka Tapiola referred to this issue when talking about the recommendations of the Venice Commission. He explicitly said that such a change of the electoral system was not beneficial and aroused worries. Mr Tapiola said he hoped the European Union would still provide new budget support, which is macro-financial assistance earmarked for the budget.

Therefore, from the positions of the European diplomats, we understand that the European Union is not happy at all and rather dissatisfied with the decision of the authorities to change the electoral system and that the EU is already sending signals that the granting of macro-financial assistance is still an undecided issue.

We will have a clearer response in September-October when we will have a new Head of the EU Delegation to Chisinau and when the External Action Service and the European Commission will come up with an assessment of the fulfilment of the political preconditions by the Republic of Moldova for allocating the first instalment of the 100 million Euros planned as macro-financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova.

Lina Grâu: Could you please remind what those preconditions are?

Dionis Cenușa: The political preconditions are related to the functioning of democratic institutions and this doesn't refer only to the electoral legislation. This is about the judiciary, and the way the justice, the media, and the local public administration work.

So there are several parameters based on which they will analyse if the Republic of Moldova meets the EU criteria. At the same time, the change of the electoral system was also mentioned in the annex to the decision adopted by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Union Council. But the change of the electoral system is not explicitly specified in the mechanism for democratic institutions. As I said, this mechanism is among the main sectors that have been supported so far by the European Union and which is important in order to ensure sustainable reforms.

Lina Grâu: In Brussels, one of the subjects of

discussion, and Mr Tapiola has also suggested this, is that a suspension of the European funding now would appeal to Russia. To what extent does this argument matter and what is your forecast?

Dionis Cenușa: Mr Tapiola is right when he says that Russia is interested in eroding the relationship between Chisinau and Brussels, because that allows it to return to the political stage of the Republic of Moldova without big efforts.

That is, the pro-European government in Chisinau directly contributes to the worsening of the dialogue with Brussels, and finally, Russia has an image-based benefit, because through its propaganda, it demonstrates once again how unpredictable the declared pro-European Moldovan politicians are. It also demonstrates how quickly the EU can change its attitude towards a country when it does not agree with the government.

So Russia is playing both cards: on the one hand, it is discrediting the EU for contributing to the consolidation of such political forces in the Republic of Moldova and on the other hand, it can undermine, in a way, the image of the Democratic Party, saying that it is the Democrats which are guilty for the fact that the macro-financial assistance does not reach the Moldovan citizens, even if promised. Practically, all actors who have affiliation with European integration are directly affected by Russia's unfriendly rhetoric towards the EU in the Republic of Moldova and in the region.

Prognoses are for the time being uncertain. This is because the EU will look at how the functioning of the mechanism of democratic institutions is ensured. The electoral system issue is not explicitly addressed in this context. Therefore, the EU could use this as an argument to continue discussing the possibility of macro-financial assistance for the Republic of Moldova.

We are well aware that there is a strong lobby of the Democrats in Brussels, which is trying to persuade the European Parliament, including the European Commission, that when the Democrats and the Socialists adopted their electoral system, they virtually followed the recommendations of the Venice Commission. On the one hand, the EU has mentioned the mechanism of democratic institutions that doesn't include the electoral system, so it can bypass the fact that the electoral system has been changed so that it can provide the

macro-financial assistance. On the other hand, the Democrats are trying to convince the EU that everything they have done so far does not contradict very much or contradicts very little the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

However, Brussels is also aware of the fact that granting the macro-financial assistance now, ahead of the parliamentary elections in 2018, would reduce the manoeuvring space of the pro-European opposition which is criticizing the government in Chisinau.

So, we are in a very, very sensitive context for the EU, which has to decide not only on whether to provide the financial assistance or postpone it. It has also to decide whether the current government deserves to be favoured by the EU, including through macro-financial assistance.

Lina Grâu: Can this happen even with the risk that the next election may be won by the party of the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon?

Dionis Cenușa: Yes, this is the reason for the uncertainty that exists in Brussels. Because we are talking about the European institutions that are diverse, and the European Parliament which is a very complex political animal with lots of interests.

We have seen how the Social Democrats have supported rather than criticized what the Democrats in Chisinau did, while the Popular Europeans and the ALDE alliance, on the contrary, were very much critical of the change of the electoral system.

In general, no one wants a pro-Russian government in Chisinau, but the EU wants to be rational and not to be manipulated by the emotions and pressure as was the case before - if it doesn't close the eyes to certain movements of the government, the pro-Russians will come to power. All these attempts to manipulate the decisions in Brussels is no longer working and the EU is no longer as naive as it used to be. Brussels does not want to get involved in the political games of Chisinau.

But at the same time, the EU does not have enough instruments to ensure sufficient legitimacy in the Republic of Moldova, so that the population is not alienated and at the same time does not contribute to marginalizing the extra-parliamentary opposition that is promoting the European integration.

Lina Grău: Mr. Cenușa, you are an attentive observer of the political life in the Republic of Moldova. We have been witnessing a very strong polarization lately - Igor Dodon's anti-Occidentalism versus pro-Occidentalism, pro-Americanism of the Democratic Party. What is this extreme positioning going to lead to? Do you see electoral connotations in this phenomenon?

Dionis Cenușa: "I do not see only electoral connotations, it's the very essence of these parties -the Democratic Party, on the one hand, and the Party of Socialists, on the other.

These parties do not have an attractive, credible, coherent, and sustainable political agenda. Until now very little has been done to meet the needs of the population, therefore the thirst for concrete, immediate, plenary results is very high among the population. That is why the ruling party and the parliamentary opposition party are both trying to exploit the geo-political rhetoric as effectively as possible in order to replace their handicaps at party level.

Besides, both parties, are trying to substitute the lack of legitimacy domestically, they are attempting at making an image transfer from the outside with the Democratic Party appealing to pro-Western and pro-European messages, while Dodon, having not very large powers and a party most often silent in Parliament, is trying to do the same thing in relation with Russia, the Eurasian integration, and the CIS.

This geo-political agenda is very convenient, because it serves both internal and external interests. I believe that without such an agenda these parties would become invisible on the political scene of the Republic of Moldova, on the one hand. On the other hand, they would become targets of frustration on the part of the population.

Therefore, they feel the need all the time to wave geo-political and as controversial and bellicose as possible issues, which allows them to exploit each time the agitated spirit of the electorate which, in fact, is waiting for some concrete results.

Lina Grău: From your point of view, is there a symbiotic or occult cooperation between the Democratic Party and the Socialists? Is there direct evidence that the two actually rely on each other for their purposes?

Dionis Cenușa: It is obvious that both parties

benefit from the existence of each other, though there are no official commitments of mutual support. Of course they will not make such formal arrangements as this is not how Moldovan politics work. Moldovan politics is characterised by huge deficit of predictability, transparency and credibility.

But as I've explained earlier, these parties need each other because they complement each other. Everything the democrats do is criticized by the socialists. On the other hand, everything the socialists are trying to do is processed in the propagandistic machine of the Democratic Party.

That is why, in my opinion, this is a very successful symbiosis by which the parties are trying to complete the public agenda with as many topics as possible about them and about their simulated struggle. This has obvious advantages in capturing the electorate's attention and expanding the electoral basin towards the centre right, if we talk about the Democratic Party.

The more vulnerable they feel at home in the Republic of Moldova, or the less credible they become with their foreign partners, the more often they resort to this semi-official struggle and cold war or cold peace.

Lina Grău: What are your forecasts for the political autumn in the Republic of Moldova?

Dionis Cenușa: I believe we are going to have a very hot political autumn- the tensions are running high, the extra-parliamentary opposition has to manifest itself and has already announced protests. We see how uncooperative the extra-parliamentary opposition is when it comes to creating the mechanism for the establishment of uninominal constituencies. The extra-parliamentary opposition is already suggesting that the next elections will be illegitimate or could be fraudulent, including because they do not want to participate in the mechanism set up by the two parties- Socialists and Democrats.

We will witness a very dynamic autumn as we see it very clearly how the extra-parliamentary opposition is drawing its priorities for the electoral campaign in 2018. At the same time, the Democrats mobilized internally and externally. On the external level, they are trying to convince the European partners that they are, in fact, natural partners for Brussels, that they are making reforms and that the reforms are sustainable. And internally, playing very much the anti-Russian card, they are trying to

penalize the socialists and thereby win votes on the one hand, and on the other hand, they are entering direct polemic with Russia in order to capitalize on everything that could come from victimization.

While the socialists, because they have a president without broad powers, a president who can make more statements that actually do, will also try to benefit from as close as possible relations with Russia. We shouldn't forget that the decision on granting the status of observer country for the Republic of Moldova within the Eurasian Union will be discussed. So the Russian card is going to be played by the socialists, who also are planning to organize protests. By doing so, they will try to compensate for its incapacity as opposition party in the Parliament and for the handicaps of their president as a political actor.

Lina Grău: Why, from your point of view, the European integration has failed to become a people's project, remaining in the area of politics and speculations at the level of political elites? What has happened and what is to be done, especially?

Dionis Cenușa: The Republic of Moldova has always been a geopolitically divided country. The pro-European orientation in the Republic of Moldova emerged much later than the pro-Russian, therefore the EU and the promoters of European values have always had to make double or triple efforts to implant ideas about good governance, transparency, civil society, freedom of speech, anti-discriminatory policies, and so on. That is why, from the beginning, the European integration was something difficult to explain and after all, remained somewhat like a sediment of something that does not meet the needs of the population, but which is imposed by the elites and serves their interests.

I think this is a systemic problem that the EU should solve in future. The political circumstances that generated this perception of European integration as an elitist project stem from the quality of the pro-European elite. That is, when a European party discredits, and after many others do the same, it creates the feeling among citizens that the European integration is being used by a corrupt pro-European elite. So the European orientation is perceived as something that corrupts or is corruptible.

The more ineffective a pro-European party is and the more corrupt and unpredictable it is, the more reluctant are the ordinary citizens towards a political project brought by the political elite. This circumstance has particularly

an impact in 2009-2016, when we had pro-European alliances in Chisinau.

Other issues creating this feeling have to do with the citizens' expectations that do not meet the EU's objectives. The EU cannot replace the government in the Republic of Moldova. What it can do though is to help implement certain reforms that can improve the situation in the country and the living standards of the citizens. While citizens often tend to accept outside governance - either from Bucharest or from Brussels – in order to fix the mistakes or errors made by the national political parties.

The rooting of European integration, the

transformation of this project into something popular depends very much primarily on the EU's communication ability and on how critical and honest the EU is when it comes to the quality of implementation of the reforms. At the same time, it depends on how close the citizens feel towards this European project. They have to see direct benefits from this European project.

That is why in one of my articles I have recently written about the issue of elitism as an approach to the European integration and about the fact that the EU should try to reach the citizens' minds, heart and stomach.

We are talking about a poor region and country where, unfortunately, the citizens expect both European values, which are extremely important, but also projects as close as possible to their real needs. And the EU has been able to demonstrate in recent years that it can support such projects. And here I am talking about energy projects, when the citizens from rural areas benefited from biomass heating and the like.

It is exactly such approaches that the EU should continue with so that the number of the euro-optimistic people grows and that the euro-scepticism does not find fertile ground for spreading.

Ștefan Gligor: The EU will assess the Moldovan authorities exclusively based on the fulfilment of their commitments

Ștefan Gligor, Program Director at the Policy and Structural Reform Center, says the EU should not allocate macro-financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova because it would support a government that, in his view, is compromising the idea of the European integration.

■ **Lina Grău:** What do you think about the messages coming from the EU lately and what do these messages say about the Moldovan - EU relationship? Can we still talk about a credible European path?

■ **Ștefan Gligor:** I believe that through the messages that the European officials have been sending, the European institutions want to understand whether we are really on the path to the European integration, as the Democratic Party claims. And I think they have big reservations about the intentions and sincerity of our authorities.

Clear messages have been formulated in this context and unprecedented legal instruments have been used, such as the annex to the 100 million Euro macro-financial assistance document - an annex coordinated between the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament and which specifies the conditional character for the provision of the



macro-financial assistance. The conditions are basic things that are also enshrined in our Constitution - the rule of law, democratic mechanisms and institutions, including the multi-party system.

This means that the European officials, having been witnessing the promotion, manipulation and adoption of this electoral reform- the adoption of the mixed electoral system- have understood that the essential element of a democratic society, namely the multi-party system, is in danger. Because uninominal systems or mixed systems favour big parties or parties that have financial and administrative resources. This means that between 2018-2022 it is very possible that

the Republic of Moldova remains with only two or three parties on the political market. This will inevitably degrade the democratic institutions and freedom which are already in a precarious condition.

The European institutions have formulated a very clear message - the relationship with the Republic of Moldova will be viewed exclusively through the fulfilment of the obligations assumed under the Association Agreement with the EU.

■ **Lina Grău:** We are witnessing a very strong lobby of the Democratic Party (PDM) internally, but we know the same is happening within the European institutions. There, PDM is trying to prove that it fulfills all the commitments under the Association Agreement and the voting of the mixed electoral system is explained in the sense that the Parliament has actually fulfilled all the technical conditions of the Venice Commission.

■ **Ștefan Gligor:** That's true and I know that Andrian Candu, the President of the Parliament, has prepared an informative note for the European diplomats and the European Institutions on the correction of the objections formulated by the Venice Commission. I'd like to tell you that they've been really good at manipulating and

presenting detailed and nicely packed untruths.

The conclusion in this context is that the European institutions are not so easy to manipulate and lie to. The Venice Commission's opinion was that the change of the system is not appropriate for now and it explained very thoroughly why. And none of those problems have been fixed.

The biggest problem of this electoral system is representativeness. We will have situations when with 10-12 or 20% of the votes in an electoral constituency certain candidates will become MPs in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. The biggest problem with this system is that there is only one round of elections. If there are 10 candidates, people's votes will disperse and the candidates will take 5, 6, 7 and 12%. The one who will take 12% will win. Normally, if there was a second round, the candidate with 12% in the first round would come last, because as a rule, this type of candidates are populist, who in the first round take the most.

This system is categorically impossible to be implemented in terms of free and fair elections, because we have a single party that has the administrative control of the Republic of Moldova. It controls the Prosecutor's Office, the police, the local public administration, as well as the courts in this country.

Moldova ranks among the last countries in the world in terms of the independence of justice - 133 out of 138- according to the World Economic Forum. With such a judicial system you cannot solve the electoral conflicts that will inevitably occur in the 50 constituencies.

In addition, we will never know who the Democratic Party candidates are – they will be many and hidden as they will claim to be independent. In fact, the PDM has already made a sociological survey on a sample of 12,000 votes, through which they learned about the most popular people at the regional level and how to create electoral constituencies to the advantage of the party.

I assure you that both the EU and the Council of Europe are aware that this reform has been a manipulation and was promoted through false promises such as the revocation of MPs. The latter is anti-constitutional and was not included in the final draft voted by the Democrats and Socialists. You cannot lie to these institutions and mislead them, even though PDM is trying to do it.

Lina Grău: Under the present circumstances, Brussels has a very difficult choice to make and it seems that things have not been decided yet at the EU level. What about the 100 million Euro promised to the Republic of Moldova? On the one hand, Mr Tapiola also said that it would be a great gift to Russia for Moldova not to be given this money. On the other hand, when you give money to a country with such a precarious democratic background, it raises questions about this partnership with the EU as the latter seems to turn a blind eye to certain negative things that happen in the Republic of Moldova.

Ștefan Gligor: Let me disagree with Mr Tapiola, with all due respect for him. A real gift for the Russian Federation would be to give this money to this government. Because what this government really wants is to increase the feeling of disappointment in the European values. It is exactly in the way those political alliances - AIE1, 2 and 3 - have failed, that the EU is likely to disappoint the citizens of the Republic of Moldova by giving this money to a government that has no credibility whatsoever.

We are in a deadlock and I think the EU understands this perfectly. That is why that annex was made and the funding was conditioned with electoral legislation and multi-party system – this is in case PDM will commit even more abuses and will hit and put pressure on the opposition as it happened in the process of protests organized by the civil society and the opposition. I think that through this annex to the Macro-Financial Assistance Agreement, the EU gave itself a free hand to act according to its own understanding of the situation.

Lina Grău: What is your prognosis about the funding – do you see this money coming

or not? The situation seems to be very difficult, including for the European officials.

Ștefan Gligor: They said very clearly that the relationship with the Republic of Moldova will be examined exclusively in the light of the Association Agreement. This means that the Republic of Moldova and the governors that we have the misfortune to have today- if they really want to prove their adherence to the European system of values- have to leave the civil society alone and renounce their plans to change the law on NGOs by which they want to annihilate any involvement in the social-political life; to leave the political opposition alone; to leave the legal institutions alone; to ensure the independence of the judiciary and the independence of the criminal prosecution bodies; to ensure freedom of the media and implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU.

So government will be assessed today only from the point of view of fulfilling the obligations under the Association Agreement. Stories, promises, populisms, and oratorical art - all this is no longer taken into account.

Lina Grău: In this context, I think we can also mention the geopolitical messages which are at extremes in Moldova - Igor Dodon has pro-Russian message, while PDM has embraced the pro-European and pro-American message, exploiting it to the fullest. Is this a symbiosis between the two parties, do they play together or there is some truth in this apparent confrontation?

Ștefan Gligor: Both parties have thoroughly examined the political history of the Republic of Moldova and concluded that the most effective method of polarizing the society and mobilizing the electorate is the geopolitical one. The first to realize that an internal enemy in the Republic of Moldova is needed for a better political development was the Democratic Party- Vlad Plahotniuc. And that explains why PDM has helped Igor Dodon so much to become president of the Republic of Moldova. He gave him huge support through his media holding, but also through the PDM resources - in the regions, as far as I know, openly or in a hidden manner, PDM has helped the Socialist Party

representatives to persuade people to vote for Igor Dodon.

Once they have brought him to presidency, our citizens are witnessing a continuous show presenting the Socialists as the big enemy and the PDM as a great defender of the European values. The Socialist Party is portrayed as being the great danger coming from the Russian Federation and Igor Dodon as the agent of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Moldova.

So they created a bipolar system and are harassing the minds of our citizens with stories about a virtual rivalry between them. But at the same time, they are sharing among themselves what they have to divide. MoldovaGaz today has a president who is a PDM member. This is a joint stock company controlled by Gazprom. But what we hear from different sources is that this appointment was lobbied by Mr Dodon. This speaks of the fact that there is an allegedly official and false agenda and a real one which is hidden from the people.

PDM is using the media holding of Mr. Plahotniuc to throw dust in our eyes and show us his allegedly official agenda, while in the backstage there exist various arrangements for crunching this state and sharing the financial, economic and political interests during the next 2018-2022 parliamentary term. In order to ensure this financial, economic and political control, the Socialist Party together with the Democratic Party have simply changed the electoral system - a thing without which they would not be able to control that state.

And this is one thing that I would like every citizen to understand - this is a circus and a lie. These people have no right to govern this country once they use lies, populism and manipulation as a basic system. We do not want such a government. We have had such a government for two decades, and if we are going to be fooled in the next period, it means that this is the destiny we deserve.

■ **Lina Grău:** What is your forecast for this political autumn?

■ **Ștefan Gligor:** The Democratic Party knows very well what it's doing and where

it is going. They have both a short-term strategy and a medium and long-term strategy and are very systemic in their approaches. What I am very concerned about is that I am not sure of the short, medium and long term agenda of the opposition in the Republic of Moldova. And this is a topic to be discussed.

If the political opposition in the Republic of Moldova thinks that the electoral reform is a fraud, the organization of protests, in my opinion, is not enough. These are absolutely necessary, but they are insufficient. If the elected representatives and our governors betray their mandate and the trust of citizens, we, those who believe in the rule of law, the first thing we have to do is to read the Constitution and see what tools the Constitution provides us with to counteract the abuses of the governors. And the legal instrument at our disposal is the referendum.

There are three types of referenda - constitutional, which requires 400,000 signatures from a certain number of districts and which is extremely difficult to achieve; consultative referendum, which in this case is not relevant and the legislative referendum which suits our interest the best. According to the Electoral Code and the Constitution, in order to hold a legislative referendum, for the people to adopt their own law, there is a need for an initiative group that would gather 200,000 signatures in support of a bill, no matter where they are collected. It may be a bill on overturning a law or promoting principles.

■ **Lina Grău:** Is this your suggestion for the opposition parties now?

■ **Ștefan Gligor:** This is the conclusion that my colleagues and I have come to as a result of a critical analysis of the options and tools that we have at our disposal. Either we accept this system, or we use all the legal instruments we have to turn it down. The legal and lawful instrument available to the people of the Republic of Moldova today is the legislative referendum.

■ **Lina Grău:** And it is predictable that the state and the presidential machinery will go against this instrument.

■ **Ștefan Gligor:** Of course, they will be fighting for power and for the control of this state.

■ **Lina Grău:** And given that the opposition is still quite weak in the Republic of Moldova, your prognosis on the success of such a referendum does not seem to be optimistic at all.

■ **Ștefan Gligor:** This is not only the task of the opposition parties in the Republic of Moldova. This can be done by the whole society. None of us, taken separately, will be able to cope with such a process - organizational, logistic, message promotion and history writing.

■ **Lina Grău:** Is the Moldovan society able to do this? Is it sufficiently conscious to take on a task so difficult to accomplish?

■ **Ștefan Gligor:** I think so. For me, as a lawyer, this goal is absolutely achievable from the organizational point of view. I believe we have enough people - experts and opinion leaders – conscious and of integrity who could initiate such a referendum and bring it to an end.

In fact, things are very simple and everybody has to understand – we either struggle or not. If we have decided we are against this system and we want to fight it, we should look at the available instruments. The protest can be one of the tools for amplifying and capitalizing on the legislative referendum. We have been protesting for a long time, and despite this fact, despite the opinion of our foreign partners, the government is so impertinent, so cheeky and insensitive that it has often told us it does not care. So, we either continue to do the same thing year after year, obtaining the same result, or we understand that this tool should be used in another context. And a concrete, tangible result is the organization and holding of the referendum.

Yes, we can fail. But anything can fail. The point is that if we don't do that and don't try, we will certainly lose. This is our belief of what we should do in the next period and we will try to do that.

Corneliu Ciurea: The crisis in the relationship with the EU can be improved

Corneliu Ciurea, independent expert is of the opinion that the EU should provide financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova, otherwise it would support anti-EU rhetoric that risks bringing Igor Dodon's Party of Socialists to power in the next 2018 parliamentary elections. In his view, the crisis in the relationship with the EU can be improved.

Lina Grău: What are the messages coming from the EU regarding the European integration of the Republic of Moldova? Is the Republic of Moldova still on the European way?

Corneliu Ciurea: The Republic of Moldova is going on the European path, but we are not at all sure that it is moving towards the European integration whose finality is the EU membership.

Indeed, there is a crisis in the relationship between Chisinau and Brussels. At the moment, there is a certain blockage- the European politicians are increasingly sceptical about the honesty of Moldovan politicians. In particular, it is about the Democratic Party. This lack of confidence is amplified by the right-wing opposition that brings to Brussels' attention the awkwardness of the government in Chişinău which is very often exaggerated and sometimes even made up.

The crisis in the relationship with the EU can be improved. I believe that this last initiative of the Democratic Party of introducing an amendment on the European integration to the Constitution is aimed at improving the relationship with the EU so that at least at the level of rhetoric it is demonstrated that the approach is sincere and that there will be deeds in various critical segments such as mass media, justice etc.

Lina Grău: This initiative of the Democratic Party that you are talking about has been criticized both by the opposition and the civil society as being populist.

Corneliu Ciurea: Any move can be criticized for being populist when it comes to the



Constitution. It is very clear that this does not involve fundamental changes. It is rather a statement of intent.

I think the criticism of the opposition is obligatory. However, this opposition which is criticizing this approach of the Democratic Party will have to support this idea at some point. I do not think the right-wing opposition will oppose to introducing this phrase into the Constitution. It is not clear what the benefits of this initiative will be – there may be no benefits. But surely this will not harm the Republic of Moldova. And in this context, if the opposition is responsible, it should support it, although it also has the right to be critical.

Lina Grău: You said earlier that the opposition has been doing lobbying activity in Brussels trying to highlight the blunders of the government. On the other hand, it is also known that the Democratic Party also has a very strong lobby and that including in the context of the electoral system reform, it is trying to convince the European Commission that the law is still in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

Corneliu Ciurea: We are certainly witnessing lobbying and pressure groups' war. The right-wing opposition has a natural ally in Brussels - it is the European People's Party, the most important pan-European party that has always supported the right-wing parties. At present, this powerful and influential party in Brussels supports Maia Sandu's PAS and Andrei Năstase's DA Platform.

On the other hand, surely, the Democratic Party, which has a very good knowledge of lobbying,

uses all its resources to impose its viewpoint in Brussels.

I think the criterion for the victory will be the 100 million euro assistance that will or will not be transferred by the EU to the Republic of Moldova. Granting funding by Brussels is an indication of sympathy or antipathy. And from this point of view, this money is much more important than the amount itself – it has a very high symbolic connotation therefore that's going to be a big fight.

Unfortunately, I have the impression that the right-wing opposition will be glad if Moldova is not given that money, which will be a bit unnatural. But that will surely be a pretty painful blow to the Democrats. So the interests here are contradictory and even though from my point of view, the opposition acts illogically, favouring the blocking of funding, its actions can be understood from the political perspective.

Lina Grău: Also Mr. Tapiola spoke about this issue at the end of his term in office. He said there is a heated discussion in Brussels on this subject and that it would be a gift to Russia now if the EU funding is not granted. On the other hand, there are analysts in Chisinau saying that the EU funds would in fact support a government that has significant slippages in the field of democracy. What is your assessment?

Corneliu Ciurea: I cannot make credible forecasts. But, indeed, Brussels is in a trap. Offering this money would support a political regime that it has reservations about, while blocking the funding would fuel the socialists and President Dodon.

If the geopolitical logic dominates - and I think it usually does – finding itself in this trap, the EU will still be forced to provide that money, albeit with very many conditions. But geopolitics usually prevails over the purely technical logic, the criteria of democracy and human rights. So my expectation is that this money will come. It might just come with some delays.

Lina Grău: During this summer, we witnessed an accentuation of some trends that emerged a little earlier, just after President Dodon's election, of polarization and positioning at geopolitical extremes of the Socialists and Democrats, that of the latter being accompanied by pro-European and even pro-American rhetoric much more pronounced than before. It is being speculated that there's actually a symbiosis between the two parties and that they are just favouring each other. So, in the end, is it polarization or

complementarity? And what are the stakes of this extreme positioning?

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** Polarizations is the expression of hostility, which obviously benefits those in a confrontation, because the public attention is directed to these actors who monopolize the political scene, which gives substance to political conflicts. And for this reason, it is obvious that the Democrats and the Socialists will gain from this electoral polarization.

However, this polarization also involves great risks for both parties, because you cannot endlessly stage the battle, a battle that can start for some political utility reasons, but which ultimately risks to degenerate and turn into a major political confrontation. And I think we are heading for this turn now.

I believe that even though there have been some collaboration between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party, such as the voting of the electoral system, the bridges have been burned down, and we will be following from this moment on a conflict escalation. That's why I think the fight is real, though there are still a lot of people who are kind of Thomas- the Unbeliever and who do not believe in the sincerity of this battle.

■ **Lina Grău:** What are your forecast for the 2017 political autumn? Next year is an election year. The opposition is not in a favourable situation either from the legislative point of view or the point of view of resources. Are we moving towards a bipolar party system?

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** I think that the right-wing parties cannot be removed from the equation. Moreover, I believe that the Democratic Party, in view of this genuine political battle with the Socialists, is in need of an ally. The Democratic Party cannot expand very far to the right,

therefore it has to cooperate with the parties that are now criticizing it fiercely.

So, the moment of this rapprochement between the Democratic Party and the right-wing parties, or a certain part of the right-wing parties, will be the most spectacular episode we are going to follow in 2018. My prognosis is that by the end of 2018 such a rapprochement and such an alliance will have to take place even though the right-wing opposition momentarily cannot imagine such an outcome.

■ **Lina Grău:** When you are talking about the right-wing opposition, you refer to...

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** Party for Action and Solidarity (PAS), Dignity and Truth Platform Party (DA) or Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM), or possibly a unionist party - PL or PUN - or another party that may appear on the political scene. So all these political parties, or some of them, will decide, in 2018, I think, to co-operate with the PDM in order to marginalize the greatest evil, which is the Party of Socialists.

■ **Lina Grău:** When discussing this issue, we shouldn't forget Mr Dodon's very close relations with the Russian Federation and the fact that certain actions are foreseen for this autumn, such as participation in the CIS summit and the signing of an observer membership agreement with the Eurasian Union. Will these aspects change the situation?

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** No, they will not. And I anticipate that in October Dodon will sign this agreement which will give the Republic of Moldova the observer status to the Eurasian Economic Union. But this status will be purely symbolic - there will be only a collaboration between this organization and the Presidency. The power in Moldova will not be part of this process. That is why this status will give Dodon certain symbolic, electoral advantages and is not going to result in very clear actions capable

of overturning the force-ratio in the Republic of Moldova and of blocking the way to the EU.

■ **Lina Grău:** What about long-term perspective?

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** In the medium and long term, this status of observer to the Eurasian Union could have real consequences only if the Socialists came to power. In that case it may materialize in something very serious and the Republic of Moldova will change its geopolitical orientation. As long as the power is held by the right-wing and centrist parties that assert their pro-European identity, there is no danger of a reorientation towards the Eurasian Union.

■ **Lina Grău:** The pro-European orientation on the one hand, and the talks about the captured state and antidemocratic slippages on the other hand, how can the two go hand in hand?

■ **Corneliu Ciurea:** I believe these two elements are today two horns of one dilemma. That is why I was saying that we are all - both the EU and the right-wing parties, and the Democratic Party - victims of this dilemma as we have to choose. We have to choose between the geopolitical struggles - and in this case we have to be with the Democratic Party- and fairness, democracy, human rights and rather support the right-wing opposition parties. Even Pirkka Tapiola suggested the solution to this dilemma. He said at the end of his term in office that he did not believe that the process of Moldova's rapprochement to the EU would have geopolitical significance. It started from the technical idea of Moldova's rapprochement, but it turned out - and he was surprised to realise that - that this process is, in fact, a very geopolitical one. That is why I think that the geopolitical reasons are going to take precedence over the technical considerations and democracy. And from this point of view, the Democratic Party is surely going to be placed at an advantage.

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