

Foreign Policy Association together with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Moldova offer you a newsletter on foreign policy and European integration issues of the Republic of Moldova. The newsletter is part of the "Foreign Policy Dialogue" joint Project.

NEWSLETTER

MONTHLY BULLETIN • SEPTEMBER 2018 • NR.7 (149)

Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

- 1.** Eugen Sturza, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Moldova: The National Army reform means, above all, the qualitative change of people, not just equipment and technology
- 2.** Valeriu Mija, Doctor of Political Sciences, Security Expert at Pro Marshall Center: Any large-scale regional phenomenon has implications for several states - and the Republic of Moldova is no exception
- 3.** Expert opinion. Rosian Vasilo: „When it comes to policy documents, things look fine”

News in Brief



The Republic of Moldova remains a strategic priority for Bucharest and its European course will be further supported by Romania. This message recently announced at the Annual Meeting of the Romanian Diplomacy was passed to Prime Minister Pavel Filip by HE Daniel Ioniță. Pavel Filip thanked Romania for its support, noting its importance in the realization of the European agenda of the Republic of Moldova, but also in the development of the bilateral projects of major interest. Among these are the Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline, the interconnection of electricity networks, the development of infrastructure and the removal of roaming tariffs between the two countries. The Romanian Ambassador said in this context that Romania's grant for renovation of kindergartens in the Republic of Moldova has been recently supplemented by three million euros. Pavel Filip also said that the Republic of Moldova relies on Romania's support in the context of taking over the presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 January 2019.



Intensification of the Moldovan-German political dialogue, the social-political developments in the Republic of Moldova, the consolidation of commercial-economic relations and the attraction of German investments in the national economy – these are just a few issues on the agenda of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Tudor Ulianoschi on his visit to Berlin. During the numerous meetings, the Moldovan official assured the German side that the transformation of the country according to the European development model and ensuring a European future for its citizens remain important goals for the Moldovan Government. The German partners appreciated the intense relations with the Republic of Moldova in political, economic and culture areas, but were concerned about the current political situation in the country. The State Secretary for European Affairs, Michael Roth, said that it is extremely problematic to cancel the results of local elections: "Voters will should be respected, the rule of law and free elections being supreme values. Only when these things are guaranteed can we and the EU build constructively a close collaboration, supporting the necessary reforms."



In this context, Minister Roth stressed that Germany expects from the future parliamentary elections in early 2019 to be free and fair, with the participation of international observers. As for the Law on Tax Amnesty, he called on the Moldovan government to finally take the concerns of international partners and civil society seriously and fully commit to the fight against corruption and building of the rule of law.



The new Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Chisinau, Angela Ganninger, presented her accreditation letters in our country. During the meeting with the Moldovan State Secretary for European Integration Daniela Morari, there were discussed the current topics on the agenda of the bilateral relations, especially the mutual interest in the intensification of the political dialogue and commercial-economic relations, in the extension of the bilateral legal framework and the efforts made by the Chisinau authorities on the way toward European integration.



Also Ambassador Lilian Darii presented the letters of accreditation to the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. During the meeting, the officials exchanged views on the current state of cooperation between our country and the North Atlantic Alliance, focusing on the objectives of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). The officials addressed also issues related to the implementation of the provisions of the Defense Capabilities Consolidation Initiative. Lilian Darii thanked the Alliance for the constant support offered to our country in the process of reforming the national security and defense sectors. Regarding the aspects of national and regional security, the Ambassador reiterated the need to withdraw the Russian military from the territory of the Republic of Moldova and to transform the current peacekeeping operation in the Transnistrian region into a civilian mission with international mandate.

National Army, invisible shield or illusion of the shield?

Sorina Ștefârță

The August national holidays have had a bitter taste this year. It is not for the first time, and yet ... like never before, these days that are meant to be "unifying" have been marked by protests and counter-protests as small diversions to the limit and actions that many of us have seen only in movies or on the news, when dozens of people have been lifted by masked policemen in order to make room for officials with regular flower bouquets...

The officials could have not laid flowers at all, rather than make it against the background of thousands of people's booing. They could have laid the flowers next to the people that were protesting, or at the Gate of the Armenian Cemetery- the resting place of many who had voted for Independence. Or they could have laid flowers at "Ghimpu's monument," or ...at any other monument in this city. But they chose confrontation and the confrontation seems to be the leitmotif of this autumn.



Because of Elections. Because of Power. Thus Fight.

The last few weeks have been evidence to this, when we have almost daily witnessed firecrackers - from the brutal deportation of teachers from the "Orizont" High School, which once again confirmed that something is rotten in our Denmark, to the road accident with the involvement of the President of the country, a true litmus paper of a society divided to the fullest, a condition that also the one who suffered had also contributed to.

Against this tense background, on September 3rd, the National Army celebrated its anniversary. They did it modestly, as it

is probably natural for such a structure to do. They did it opening its doors to the employees and their families so that they see that the National Army is made of people for the people. And yet, do we know what it is really happening there? Are we confident, when we see Russian tanks "playing" the escalation of the Nistru or in the event of a real crisis, that these people in khaki clothes whom we periodically meet on the street, will be able to stand up and defend us? And will they have what to defend us with? What are their real capabilities? For in a poor country there cannot be a rich army.

We would like to find out about this in our current edition of the Newsletter.

The National Army Reform means, above all, the qualitative change of people, not just equipment and technology

Eugen Sturza, Minister of Defense of the Republic of Moldova

On September 3rd this year, the National Army celebrated its 27th anniversary. Just a few days younger than the country it serves, the National Army has been fully aware of the problems faced by the society throughout these years. Moreover, while enjoying a high level of confidence by the population, often the defense sector has been left among the last on the list of decision-makers' priorities, remembering about the armed forces, at best, when major natural disasters happened. However, the security challenges that have become more and more noticeable in recent years have raised the issue of modernizing and professionalizing the defense sector, a goal that has taken shape together with the adoption in July 2018 of the National Defense Strategy. How this process is taking place and what the National Army and its defense capabilities look like today - these are the issues that I've addressed in the interview with the Defense Minister Eugen Sturza.

It is a separate world, which is part of the Republic of Moldova

■ **Mr. Eugen Sturza, the National Army is the same age as the Republic of Moldova- 27 years old. What does this structure look like today as for many people, it's a parallel world that they know nothing about and think it's nothing to do with them?**

■ It is indeed a separate world, but not an isolated one, because the Army is an



integral part of our country and society. Yes, in this world, they live according to internal laws, but the laws of the Republic of Moldova are fully observed. And, just like in other areas, in the defense sector the key mechanism is people - very disciplined, by virtue of their military training, as they need to be guided, for better functioning. It's a fair approach to the army. At the same time, since I've become Minister of Defense, I'm trying to motivate the colleagues to come up with ideas and solutions, and not always wait for directions. It is important that the senior officers of the Ministry of Defense and High Command leadership be not afraid to express their opinion and thus bring added value and more efficiency to our work. This is more complicated, I don't deny it, because it is simpler to just fulfil the orders and not take responsibility. That's why we send them to study abroad, we teach them foreign languages - we want to make the most of their potential so that they come back home with new ideas and strategies.

■ **What would those be? Because it is a sector where you cannot improvise too much...**

■ Let's start from the reform of the National Army, which is a priority and which in no way involves only technical equipment. For me, the reform means, above all, the person, the man in the system, who should become the greatest value. And here I need ideas, proposals - *what* we need to do for the military and *how* to do it. It's not for the person x or y or the Minister Sturza to decide who of the officers will go to study, for example, but there should be a very clear selection process – which is already being implemented! - in which the human factor can no longer intervene. This is important because, on the basis of these studies, our soldiers go on missions and are advanced in positions and ranks. This is how we ensure that professionals and valuable people are promoted.

■ **Is this a step towards a professional army mentioned as a key element of the National Defense Strategy?**

■ Obviously, since all the armies in the world have long gone beyond the strictly military framework. We talk about technologies, innovative approaches, foreign languages ... Only the military under contract go to study abroad. For this, they learn English at one of the six specialized centers of the Ministry of Defense. Today, the military of our country finds itself in the best education

institutions of the world, from Romania to the United States of America ... As far as the young people who come for the regular military service, our aim is to integrate them into the system and to educate them, for instance, because many of them have big knowledge gaps. Many of them have never been to a concert or theatre ... This also reflects a state of the society in which we live, because we all walk on the same good or bad roads, we drink the same water and we use the same public services.

In the given context, I would like to add something. Some decades ago, it was normal for the youth who were doing their military service to learn a profession. Also nowadays we offer this opportunity: the soldiers get driving license, become chefs. But I would still like to focus on other skills as the military profession should be the main one. Let's train good sappers, good soldiers for special forces. The soldiers don't have to wash dishes, peel potatoes, or mow the grass any more. These services should be outsourced. And the military should learn and train so that they are well prepared when the country asks them to intervene here or on an international mission.

We want to have military that are interoperable with other structures and other armies

■ ***What else do the professionalization and modernization of the Army mean? And how do you make sure that the Strategy doesn't remain at the declaration level of intent?***

■ The National Defense Strategy comes to adjust the defense system to the new requirements, triggered by a series of new threats. It is the document that puts everything on a logical basis - identifies the risks and threats, tells us what we should do, what we need to develop, how much investment to make, and what the defense budget is. Based on

the Defense Strategy, we have already drafted the Military Strategy which is being analysed by the Government and due to be approved by it in September this year. This document is yet another step forward in the reform process, de facto describing the structure of the armed forces of the Republic of Moldova: how they will show, where they will be located, what armament and technical units are needed. Then we will develop programmes and projects - for example, the "Professional Army" Programme, adopted in June this year. As a minister, I know exactly what I have to do in the next four years, how many ammunition, weapons and techniques I have to acquire, in what infrastructure to invest, which military unit to rebuild. So there is no way the Strategy can remain a statement of intent. It is rather a very precise action plan of the sector.

■ ***Is the app. 0.40 percent of GDP earmarked for the defense sector going to be enough?***

■ Money is never sufficient, whether we are talking about Culture, Health or Defense. The big problem is that, until recently, almost no investment has been made. In addition, I think it is wrong when the walls are painted while the roof is leaking like a sieve. That's why we decided to strategically invest in every object. We will not change one window in Chisinau, two in Cahul and three in Balti. It is better to build today a new building, which will not require major investments for another 15 years, and tomorrow to build another one in Bălți, and after tomorrow - in Cahul. This is going to be our approach, starting from this year, with all the military units. That's exactly what we're going to do with the procurement, because it's natural for the National Army to have permanent procurement of weapons and ammunition.

■ ***I understand that you cannot be very open, yet: do we buy armament or***

rely on donations from NATO member states?

■ First of all, I have to mention that NATO doesn't offer weapons. It is a general rule. In addition, for someone to give you something, you have to show that you are making an effort too and that you are planning to invest. It is much easier to ask for 20 mobile phones when you prove that you have already bought ten from your own resources. But when you spend the money unreasonably, then you go and complain about how poor your country is and how small the Defense budget is, it is not very convincing. So we are buying weapons by ourselves and many of such procurements are going to be made for the first time in the Republic of Moldova. We are going to focus on technologies, so that if one of our soldiers happens to be in a French or Italian unit, he should be able to speak the same language and not feel like in a spacecraft. This is our goal - to have interoperable military with other structures and with other armies. Although ... the fact that our soldiers are trained on old machines is also an advantage, because they can operate both old and modern military equipment. As a result, they are flexible for all types of situations. This balance helps them to integrate more easily into joint military exercises with other countries, but also in the peacekeeping missions that our country participates in.

■ ***I think you have disappointed half of the country population who is convinced that NATO is distributing armament right and left...***

■ Fortunately, NATO can be a strategic partner without giving us armament. The Alliance is very helpful with expertise in modernizing and strengthening our security. And it is already supporting us under established projects such as the liquidation of pesticides and chemicals in the Republic of Moldova. Recently, on June 28, the last batch of pesticides from the Republic of Moldova was discharged

from the Sangerei rayon. And I am glad that after 16 years of hard work, together with other national authorities and international structures, we have managed to free our country from tons of pesticide waste that threatened people's health. At present we are working on other five major projects that are going to be implemented with NATO support, aimed at developing the military medicine, strengthening the cybernetic system and fighting cybercrime. As you can see, these projects serve both military and civil purposes.

These forces are anything but peacekeeping forces

■ ***In addition to the challenges and threats, the National Defense Strategy talks also about our regional role in security. What is exactly this role and what should it be? Are we, indeed, a security provider?***

■ I'm underlining at every meeting I have that it is the Republic of Moldova, not Romania, that is today the Eastern border of the European Union. And when I say the *Republic of Moldova*, I do not stop at the Nistru, but I refer to the whole territory of the country. I also say in the meetings that it is on the situation in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova that will depend what the EU border will look like. Of course, today things are more serious in Ukraine, but we face the same threats as we have the same Russian forces stationed on the national and sovereign territory of the country. So you cannot solve the Ukrainian problem alone and leave the Transnistrian conflict aside. That is why we continue to insist on this issue. We discuss the issue in a broad format - in the United States and Brussels, with our partners in Romania and the OSCE, whom we have asked to honour their commitments according to their mandate. For there was a time when we were observing one thing on the ground, and another thing was reported in Vienna, which

was different from the actual situation in the field. For example, out of the more than 320 exercises conducted by the Transnistrian side together with the Operative Group of Russian troops (GOTR) in 2016, only one was reported in Vienna ... Fortunately, things have improved recently and it is much easier for us now to communicate and address the withdrawal of Russian troops. There is an increasing understanding that they pose a real threat in the region.

■ ***There exist discussions, but is there any chance?***

■ I hope and believe in the withdrawal of the troops and even of the ammunition stationed in Cobasna. Or, at least, in their disposal. And I'm ready to look for money to bring an ammunition disposal plant, because they are a strategic threat and a danger to the population of the Eastern Moldova and Ukrainian districts. At the same time, we will continue to insist on replacing the so-called peacekeeping mission with a UN Mission. Because today, the Russian troops in the Transnistrian region are anything but peacekeeping forces. How can you threaten your neighbour and say you want to be friends at the same time? For this is what Russia is trying to do, through more and more frequent military exercises with forcing of the Nistru. This type of exercises in the Security Zone with armoured trucks without car plates are provocative actions that violate the regime of the security mechanism in the Security Zone, shaking the basis for justifying by Russia of the peacekeeping mission, and it is more than obvious that it doesn't provide peace in the region.

■ ***By the way, is the action "Ministry of Defense opens its doors", which you held on September 2nd, an indirect response to the traditional demonstration of force that Tiraspol organizes, on a yearly basis, on the day of the so-called independence of the self-proclaimed region?***

■ No way. We would have what to show - new technologies, new units, and new weapons - but that is not the purpose, and their place is on the instructional polygons. What we organized at the ministry on September 2nd aimed at bringing the army closer to the people, so as not to have that parallel world you mentioned about in the beginning and that our fellow citizens know that the military are not robots with weapons in hand, but personalities with great dignity and heart who are ready to defend our country at any moment. All soldiers were wearing civilian clothes, accompanied by their children who have finally seen "where the mother or father is working and what they do day by day. We cultivate patriotism as well, by way of example. We are not the American, nor Romanian or French, but believe me, we do have things to be proud of - people first of all! In order for these people not to leave the system, however, we should offer them good working conditions - they should be well-trained so as not to feel inferior to their colleagues in other countries, to have where to train in order to keep fit. Army means training and discipline, but also military treated with much respect both at home and abroad. In this context, I'd like to mention that I'm planning to increase our presence in multinational contingents, for two reasons. The first is the experience that these people come back home with after having interacted with colleagues from other countries - they are more confident and stronger from a professional point of view and can pass on this knowledge to their colleagues here. And the second reason is an emotional one: I'm convinced that the military is the country's best ambassadors. They help the local population in the conflict zones, and by doing so they proudly hold the Republic of Moldova's flag all over the world. And I want this flag to fly in as many parts of the world as possible.

■ ***Thank you for the interview and I wish you great success!***

Sorina Ștefăruță

Any large-scale regional phenomenon has implications for several states - and the Republic of Moldova is no exception

Valeriu Mija, Doctor of Political Sciences, Security Expert at Pro Marshall Centre, OSCE International Advisor

■ **Mr. Mija, on September 3rd, the National Army celebrated its 27th anniversary. To what extent can we say today that the Republic of Moldova has a mature defense system capable of coping with modern challenges?**

■ During these 27 years, the National Army, like any other institution in the Republic of Moldova, has been a faithful reflection of domestic developments, both politically, economically and socially. The army has always been a symbol of statehood. Under the modern conditions, the National Army became a promoter of statehood, being involved in several international peacekeeping missions, where Moldovan soldiers fulfil their duties with great dignity, proudly carrying the flag of our country. This is an important thing when we are a young state and the international community knows little about us. At the same time, the National Army and the defense system have always been in a complex interdependence with two important factors: the developments in the international security environment and what can be considered the security dilemma for the Republic of Moldova - the Transnistrian conflict. With reference to the first factor, I believe that the development of the National Army capabilities to respond to the challenges should have been initiated a little bit earlier. Because under the new threats to the state security, the Army's function is more of pro-active reaction to crisis situations or contributing to the international effort of preserving



security and stability in the world. Speaking of the second factor, the National Army keeps parity for stability in the security zone of the country's eastern districts. It should be noted that the defense system is viable, but it requires modernisation, adjustment and investment in order to be cost-effective.

The training system of the military reserve should be maintained

■ ***What does the National Army lack currently, not necessarily in terms of technical endowment? How do you assess the process of modernizing and professionalizing the armed forces?***

■ In the era of post-modernism and globalization we are faced with a new phenomenon - the faster promotion of high technology in the commercial sector compared to the industrial-military one. For example, the Internet and IT software, being motivated by

commercial profit, exceed sometimes the speed of the military industries' production, respectively the army endowment. Another phenomenon is the "hunting of qualified specialists". The authorities of several European countries have become aware of this in the 1990s, and since then they have been striving to invest consistently in military specialists, as well as to motivate them through various bonuses, in addition to fairly competitive salaries. The Moldovan authorities should be aware of the effects of these two phenomena and promote programmes aimed at ensuring both the real-time modernization of armed forces and their continuous professionalization. Otherwise, there is a risk of not being able to keep pace with the rapid developments of the international security environment and, as a result, of facing new effects.

■ ***Is professional army the solution? And are we able to produce professionals in the field?***

■ Professionalization of the army should have been initiated much earlier. The technologies have advanced so much that it is necessary to train and keep the specialists for a long time so as they can operate the technologies. Within one-year service term, the regular military goes through training and leaves in reserve with accumulated knowledge. However, I believe that the training system of the military reserve should be preserved as the military reserve can mobilize in situations of deep crisis for



national security. And yes, the Republic of Moldova is capable of producing a professional army. But I'm not sure if the current political class is aware of the fact that at the first stage of professionalization there will be need for more incremental investments in order to achieve the transformation.

■ ***We are used to making jokes about “the tanks that can get the entire Moldova in a tizzy in just two hours”, but is this joke still valid? And, if so, is the Republic of Moldova able to cope with such a situation?***

■ This phenomenon is called “artificial illusions,” and is a consequence of watching movies about tank battles in the World War II, or simply the result of lack of knowledge of military technology. In fact, the recent conflicts in Afghanistan, Georgia, Iraq or Syria demonstrate that the anti-tank artillery has developed in such a way as tanks are no longer a major element of attack, being very vulnerable and expensive. It is more of an effective element of supporting attack forces, ie mechanized infantry at a safe security distance, as well as a psychological element. The Republic of Moldova does not have this type of equipment, but it has sufficient artillery, including anti-tank weapons to combat those armoured vehicles.

The possibility of repeating the events similar to those in 1992 is minimal

■ ***In the absolutely undesired occurrence of a new 1992, to what extent are we able to cope with such a situation? How functional are the term military, the reservist military, but also the National Army professionals?***

■ The practice of several international conflicts shows that the possibility of repeating events similar to those of 1992 is minimal, because they no longer produce political dividends, for the

terrestrial fights don't produce quick military victories. Moreover, at the present stage, the Republic of Moldova has a National Army whose capabilities are much higher than those of the Moldovan army in 1991-1992. At the same time, the possibility of launching the “hybrid war” or the “proxy” method that use the internal political, economic, ideological and social vulnerabilities, has devastating effects for the national security. If is to analyze, in the given context, the development of the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine and the situation with the annexation of the Crimea, we realize that the “hybrid war” was launched against our neighbours long before 2014. The authorities of the Republic of Moldova should react firmly to such phenomena, which prove to be extremely dangerous for national security.

■ ***Which, in your opinion, are currently the biggest security and defense challenges for the Republic of Moldova - local, regional, global? How do they differ from the classic concept of security challenges?***

■ I believe in comprehensive and comparative approach to global security analysis - which is true also for the Republic of Moldova, whose capacities in international relations are rather modest. Practically, this means that a geopolitical event can easily affect our country. Ignoring the analysis of global and, above all, regional challenges can lead to a strategic error in ensuring the national security and defense. We can focus much on the internal factor, but without knowing how the international security system works, we are risking deepening into the “regionalism” and “provincialism” and not see the long-term danger. Obviously, the analysis of internal situation and risks is important. But our history shows us that they have always been linked to the external factors of the global system.

■ ***How dependent are we, actually,***

on what is happening around us? Is it justified to believe that Syria or other hot zones of the world are stories that do not concern us?

■ I would rather opt for notions such as “interdependence” or “symmetric and asymmetric dependence”, since globalization has spreads on a large scale in the 21st century, thus any regional phenomenon has effects on several states. For example, an analysis of the situation in Syria, Ukraine and the Balkans shows that super-powerful actors exercise their capacity to promote complex interdependence or asymmetric dependence in their geopolitical interest areas. For the Republic of Moldova these situations continue to be important. For example, because of the Transnistrian factor, Chisinau avoids recognizing Kosovo's independence and is very careful about developments in the Balkans. Similarly, for several experts the successive outcome of the hybrid operation called “Novorossia”, launched in Ukraine in 2014, was known - and namely the setting of new borders along the Dnieper, the cutting of access of the neighbouring state to the Black Sea, the joining of the Transnistrian region to the “Novorossia” and taking maximum dividends from the south of our country, where there are many sympathizers of the so-called “Russkii Mir”.

Transnistria has a geostrategic role in the Moscow's plans in the Balkans

■ ***Does the National Security Strategy, adopted in July, respond to these challenges? What should the Government do to implement it?***

■ To cut it short, the priority will be to modernise the defense sector as urgently as possible – only in this condition will it respond quickly and effectively to the challenges outlined above.

■ **To what extent, in your opinion, is defense a priority for the authorities of the Republic of Moldova? Is there a consensus at the level of key institutions in this regard - Parliament, Government, Presidency? Is internal politics an obstacle?**

■ Some of our politicians treat the development of international relations with much romanticism and sometimes also demonstrate a lack of geostrategic knowledge. For which reason, the defense sector has often been a tendentious priority, depending on relations with the Russian Federation and the situation in the Transnistrian region. At the same time, the diametrically opposed views on how to ensure national security are obvious at the “ideological” level expressed by political parties - and this is not good for the development of the defense sector of the Republic of Moldova.

■ **Does Chisinau succeed in making full use of the international defense cooperation agreements to which it is a party? For example, the potential for cooperation with NATO, but also others, if any (you can provide examples etc.).**

■ The viability of the sector is to a large extent due to the international cooperation. The partners of the Republic of Moldova provided us bilateral support when the country needed to build the defense sector and I would like to mention the assistance from Germany, Greece, France, Romania, Turkey, the United States of America, Great Britain and so on. These states provided theoretical and functional training to the Moldovan officer corps, but also provided our country with modern military technical equipment. At the same time, the NATO Partnership for Peace Programme, launched in 1994, allowed our country to understand and change its vision when it comes to the defense sector in the new realities. Today, the cooperation with NATO through the

Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) facilitates the planning and development of several initiatives and programmes, such as the Capability Operational Concept, which allows for the training of the military units for international peacekeeping operations in line with international standards; reforming of the defense planning system; democratic control over the defense sector, promotion of social projects (destruction of pesticides); cooperation in the scientific field. Obviously, there are people who are suspicious about the cooperation within NATO, which is a Cold War historical atavism. However, it should be noted that the North Atlantic Alliance also has many partners, including most of the neutral states in Europe, all CIS member states, most of the countries in the Mediterranean Sea. Personally, I think the Republic of Moldova can only benefit from this.

■ **One of the issues that which has been discussed for a few years now is the replacement of the Russian peacekeepers from the Nistru with a UN Civilian Mission. How realistic is it?**

■ The agreement from 21 July 1992 signed by the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova does not provide for such a peacekeeping mission, which was an enormous legal mistake. Any UN peacekeeping force has an annual mandate, which is revised and approved by the UN Security Council. Any OSCE Field Mission has an annual mandate reviewed and approved by the Permanent Council. Russia’s argument regarding the operation in the security zone is simple: “after the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict”. It sounds “noble”, but it is a political trap that our authorities got into in 1992.

Also the idea proposed by the Chisinau authorities is noble, but not achievable at the moment for several reasons. Firstly, because the Russian Federation looks differently at the development of

the situation in this geopolitical area, where Transnistria has a geostrategic role in the Moscow plans for the Balkans. Currently, the regional status quo is not favourable for Russia, which has taken a “strategic break” in the sense that it will not do anything for the final settlement of the dispute and will count on another geopolitical opportunity in the future. We can talk about actions to make life easier for the residents of the region. However, we have to be aware that Russia’s decision on the Transnistrian region will depend on the possible dividends from the crises in Ukraine and Syria, the situation in the Balkans and Turkey, and the developments in the crises of the European Union and NATO. The replacement of the peacekeeping format in the security zone will only be possible when the weapons and ammunition from the Colbasna military depot (about 20,000 tons) as well as the military troops of the Russian Federation (GOTR) stationed illegally on the territory of our country are evacuated. Otherwise, despite their different status in the Republic of Moldova, the Russian peacekeeping forces (according to the agreement from July 21, 1992) and GOTR units will always be interdependent.

■ **In 2016 you sustained your PhD thesis on Neutrality. Is neutrality a functional policy for the Republic of Moldova?**

■ In the academic researches on neutrality as a political and legal category in international relations, I concluded that the permanent neutrality status of the Republic of Moldova which was self-declared and adopted in the 1994 Constitution, is non-functional in ensuring the national security. Thus, the Republic of Moldova appears as a state where the authorities occasionally promote “a policy of neutrality,” which is altogether another concept of neutrality and is called *Neutrality* (a selective political attitude towards events). The international practice demonstrates that neutral states are genuinely respected

for three reasons: the main actors of the international system declare their respect through international law; neutral states are not at the crossroads of geostrategic interests; neutral states have sufficient capacity to defend themselves. In the case of the Republic of Moldova's declared neutrality status, it is necessary to fulfil some mandatory conditions:

1. Political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict with the ending of the peacekeeping mission led by the Russian Federation.
2. Evacuation of foreign troops, including the troops and ammunition of the Russian Federation from the territory of the Republic of Moldova.
3. Recognition of this neutrality status at the international level - the easiest way would be within the UNO, as Turkmenistan succeeded in 2005.

However, we can see that these conditions will be very difficult to be fulfilled in the near future. Moreover, this still does not guarantee full national security. In this context, I would say that the way things are going to be set in the future depends on the developments in Ukraine, but I don't rule out certain geopolitical compromises that some experts may not know about, since the global security paradigm has changed after the recognition of Kosovo's independence, the war in Georgia, the crises in Syria and Ukraine. De facto, today we are witnessing an attempt to solve global problems through the approach of political neorealism, which is not accepted by the European Union. However, some experts believe that the intentional actors will have to reach a compromise in zones of geopolitical tensions anyway, in order to avoid a large-scale conflict.

■ **Thank you for the interview!**

Sorina Ștefârță

Expert opinion

„When it comes to policy documents, things look fine”



Rosian Vasiloï,
Analyst on Security Issues at IDIS
“Viitorul”, former Border Police
Deputy Chief of the Republic of
Moldova

About the defense sector as a priority for the government

When it comes to policy documents, things look fine. Thus, according to the [Government Action Programme for 2016-2018](#), security and defense represent priority areas for the Government: „1. Reforming and modernizing the defense and security sector. 2. Updating the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova in order to cope with the international situation, including by capitalizing on the cooperation with the European Union in the field of common security and defense policy”. The National Defense Strategy and the Action Plan for its Implementation for

the period 2018-2022 specify other priority directions in the field and namely:

- Development of combined military capabilities and their consolidation for the effective fulfilment of the constitutional state defense mission;
- Ensure operation of the mobilization mechanism;
- Intensification of the parliamentary scrutiny;
- Ensuring the legal framework;
- Strategic communication;
- Strengthening national defense capabilities to anticipate, prevent and counteract threats and risks to state security, especially hybrid security;
- Improvement of the national crisis management system during the state of emergency.

Obviously there are more other sectoral policies in the field. But, even today, we don't have yet a comprehensive document, such as a National Security Strategy, although, as I've mentioned above, the Government Action Programme provided for it to be updated. The draft of this extremely important policy document for our country was developed by a group of national experts, with the support of civil society and development partners

in 2015-2016. But in June 2017, President Igor Dodon [withdrew](#) this strategic document on the grounds it “no longer corresponds to the substantial changes that have taken place at the national, regional and international levels.” Similarly, Igor Dodon calls for the elaboration of a new strategy that “corresponds to the national interests, the neutrality status, the consolidation of the statehood and the country modernization” and declares that the initiation of the Strategy development process is exclusively the prerogative of the head of state. All said and done, Igor Dodon set up by Decree a new [Commission for elaboration of the National Security Strategy of Republic of Moldova](#), which was to submit the document for approval by the end of 2018. What happens to this document and the work of this commission, nobody knows. The fact is that, despite the major changes in the regional and national security issues, we are living with a National Security Strategy approved by Parliament in 2011.

About funding that is more underfunding

The security and defense sector funding plays a very important role. Currently, the Defense sector is underfunded accounting for [0,4% of GDP, which is below the European average of 1,4%](#). For comparison, the „state budget” of the separatist regime in Tiraspol allocates 6% on ‘defense’, which means 1.4% of the region’s GDP, being thus in line with the European average for the sector. The things on the right bank of the Nistru are quite different. According to an [analysis](#) by Igor Munteanu, Executive Director of

IDIS “Viitorul”, in 2018 the Parliament voted, to the benefit of the Ministry of the Interior, budget rectifications of 250 mln MDL, which raises the public order funding to the huge figure of 5.9 billion MDL. In dynamics, we can see that, from 2009 until 2014, the budget expenditures for the public order have increased by approx. 43% (from 1.5 to 2.17 billion MDL, which means an increase of about 120 MDL annually). Meanwhile, the Parliament has increased the spending on maintaining public order by 2.4 times: from 2.17 billion MDL in 2014 to 5.25 bn. MDL in 2018 - an increase by 3,077 billion MDL in absolute values. A current dignitary said, at one point, that “we have as much security as we invest in it.” It is undisputed that the figures presented above speak for a certain kind of “security” that helps the government protect itself from its own citizens. This is not about real security and investments in defense in order to achieve the priority directions outlined in the policy documents. These budget data show that, de facto, a police state is being built in the Republic of Moldova against its citizens. In conclusion, the National Defense is like a “Cinderella” in conditions of extremely high security risks.

About the National Army at the age of 27

In the National Army we have dedicated staff who are trying to survive under the conditions of limited state funding. Given this situation, I would say that all the governors who have been at the forefront in the past 27 years lacked a clear vision of how to develop the National Army and the defense sector. And that despite all statements and policy documents. So,

the vision of the future of the National Army should be reconfigured, because we are still living with stereotypes that the Army is responsible for Defense. This is wrong and the task of us all - state institutions, civil society organizations, citizens - is to change this harmful paradigm. And, obviously, the government should have a strong say in this. Otherwise, we may risk to have impediments to capitalize on the assistance provided by external partners, especially NATO, including in the context of the implementation of the Defense Capacity Building Initiative (DCBI) in the Republic of Moldova.

About the biggest security challenges

At IDIS „Viitorul” we have conducted several [analyses](#) on this topic and I think the problem is the way in which the Republic of Moldova is developing its capacities to address these challenges. In fact, I would call them vulnerabilities, threats and risks - and divide them. The National Security Strategy Draft, which I was talking about earlier, addressed three risks for the Republic of Moldova - external, cross-border and internal ones. The first category is the regional instability and the war between Russia and Ukraine, which limits the capacity of the Republic of Moldova to promote its strategic interests, such as European integration or the identification of a solution to the Transnistrian conflict. The second category allows for the use by the cross-border criminal organizations of the territory of the country as a route for trafficking in human beings, drugs, weapons, goods and illegal migration to EU countries. And the third category of risks is corruption,

the undermining of democracy and rule of law, which provoke distrust of citizens in the main state institutions and policy makers and undermine the democratic foundations of society, but also the credibility of the state internationally.

The National Defense Strategy responds to these risks only partially and not in a way we would like to. The answers should be provided by the National Security Strategy, but given the fact that the political class lacks conceptual knowledge – it seems to remain with the mentality that “somebody will protect us from risks – this didn’t happen. Thus, due to endless internal political struggles, the Republic of Moldova remains vulnerable to the risks of defense and security.

About the border that is more than a formal demarcation line

I think that in recent years, we have succeeded in changing the perception of state border as a security factor at the conceptual level. While its demarcation is a sub-factor in the

integrated state border management model. Together with the approval of the Moldova - EU Action Plan in 2005, we introduced the Integrated State Border Management (ISBM) term - in line with the EU procedures and standards in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. It is a concept where every actor has a say - the Border Guard Service is responsible for overseeing the crossing of the State border, the Customs Service - for economic and customs security. The adoption and application by our country of the European ISBM model is a strategic decision. At the same time, we have to admit that certain policy documents in the field that expressly reflect the commitments of the Republic of Moldova on the border issues stipulated in the Association Agreement with the EU, are approved with one-year delay. I refer particularly to the new National Strategy on State Border Management whose approval is delayed. The [existent policy document in this area](#) has lost its legal power in December last year.

In this context, I would like to mention the demarcation issue of the state

border with Ukraine that started in 2003 and which is not completed yet. The completion of this process will provide us with more legal and diplomatic mechanisms to minimize the impact of the demands of separatist movements in the Republic of Moldova, especially with regard to the Transnistrian segment of the Moldovan-Ukrainian state border. This will allow us to complete the process of taking control of the given segment, but only if the national interests prevail. For the time being, however, it seems that this is not entirely desirable. There are still many questions related to the state border with Romania, which is the external border of the EU and NATO. The risk factors in this sector (eg, smuggling) give us a hard time and it is important to build awareness about this at the national level. Otherwise, there could be a risk of tougher talks with European partners on the issue of visa liberalization, citizenship for investment, human rights and the rule of law.

Sorina Ștefârță

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



Foreign Policy Association (APE) is a non-governmental organization committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country Europeanization. APE was established in fall 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public personalities and former senior officials and diplomats, all of them reunited by their commitment to contribute with their expertise and experience to formulating and promoting by the Republic of Moldova of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a German social democratic political foundation, whose purpose is to promote the principles and foundations of democracy, peace, international understanding and cooperation. FES fulfils its mandate in the spirit of social democracy, dedicating itself to the public debate and finding in a transparent manner, social democratic solutions to current and future problems of the society. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has been active in the Republic of Moldova since October 2002.