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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

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News in Brief



The Republic of Moldova reconfirms the support and recognition of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, as well as its right to use international waters. This is the position expressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration in Chisinau on Monday, November 26, on the conflict that broke out the previous day at the Azov Sea between Russia and Ukraine. Also the Parliament Speaker Andrian Candu strongly condemned Russia's aggression towards Ukraine: "I urge the international community to apply all instruments of international law to prevent the escalation of the situation in the Kerch Strait area. We are sympathising with Ukraine and are supporting its right to use territorial waters according to the international law norms" wrote the speaker on his Facebook, on Monday. The same day, November 26, several global actors expressed concern about events in the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait, with the involvement of Russian and Ukrainian navy. The Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko urged Russia to immediately "release" the Ukrainian navy men and their captured ships, while the Kiev Supreme Rada met the request of the head of state to impose Martial Law in the neighbouring country Ukraine.



The real rapprochement between the Republic of Moldova and Romania is done through concrete projects, in the interests of the citizens of our states", Prime Minister Pavel Filip said at a joint meeting of the two countries' governments. He particularly appreciated Romania's support in implementing the reforms and continuing the European path of our country. In the context of the bilateral agenda, Pavel Filip and his counterpart, Viorica Dăncilă, reviewed the successful joint projects on the social and cultural-humanitarian dimension: renovation of hundreds of kindergartens in the Republic of Moldova, donation of school buses, renovation of the Organ Hall, the National Art Museum in Chisinau, and the "B. P. Hașdeu" Theatre from Cahul. At the same time, the two officials mentioned that, for a greater rapprochement between our countries, there is a need to speed up the projects aimed at interconnection of the electronic communications, energy and transport infrastructure. In this respect, Prime Ministers Pavel Filip and Viorica Dăncilă insisted on the need to launch the second phase of the construction of the Ungheni-Chisinau pipeline and to start the projects for building the bridges over the Prut River.



At the same meeting, the two Cabinets of Ministers agreed on a roadmap for the implementation of joint projects, and setting deadlines and responsibilities for each sector. The agreed documents include agreements on cooperation in the field of tourism; education and culture; assistance and consular protection for persons with dual citizenship; health and medical science; relations with the diaspora; promotion of entrepreneurship, economic and corporate cooperation; promotion of cooperation in business on third markets; creation/ activity of joint patrol teams at the common state border, etc. Also, a Joint Declaration on the lifting of roaming charges was signed.

Republic of Moldova, between geography and geopolitics



Kerch Strait, 25 November 2018. Only 800 km distance from Chisinau...

Sorina Ștefârță

The last week of autumn has shown us once again that things in the world often evolve faster and in a different way than we would imagine. And the fact the world is big doesn't mean it does not affect us...

On Sunday, November 25, this world was focused on Brexit. Meanwhile, in an extraordinary meeting of the EU Council in Brussels, the leaders of the 27 EU member states (without London, already) approved the agreement on the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union. That

was in the morning ... For in the evening of the same day – November 25th - the world was again thinking of war as a result of the confrontation between the Russian and the Ukrainian military navy, produced on the Azov Sea in the Kerch Strait. In the evening of the following day, the

► Verkhovna Rada in Kiev approved the Decree of the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, which had imposed Martial Law in Ukraine, including in the regions of Odessa and Vinnitsa, neighbouring Transnistria ...

What is happening in Chisinau in relation to these global and regional developments? Chisinau is busy with ... elections, to quote the political analyst Anatolie Golea - and this consumes all our time. What else is happening? - delayed reactions or traditional silence. For example, President Klaus Iohannis seemed to be pleased with the Brexit Agreement, on the grounds that the "rights of the Romanians" are protected. We are silent - perhaps because we don't have cousins in England, or perhaps simply because they don't vote for "the right people"... As for the recent Russian-Ukrainian tensions, in addition to the fact that the officials' reactions were quite late, they didn't answer the question which, let's admit, is worrying everybody: what is going to happen in the case it happens?..

President Igor Dodon, who marked two years in office in November, is the key protagonist of the current edition of the newsletter. He is optimistic about the Moldovan foreign policy, especially due to the concept of balance in relations with the East and the West that he strongly committed to promote in the relations with the country's partners.

It's a geopolitical approach that has the right to life. Only the geography tells us some figures, e.g. that London is 2600 kilometres away from Chisinau, Kiev – 500 km, and Kerchi - just 800km. If we think we are far away and things there don't affect us... blessed we are. But it is important to remember that Tiraspol is only at 70km distance from Chisinau.

In the field of foreign policy, I will insist on balance in the relations with the West and the East

Igor Dodon, President of the Republic of Moldova



On November 13 this year, there were two years since the Socialist leader Igor Dodon became President of the Republic of Moldova as a result of a universal ballot organized after a 16-year break (when the head of state was elected by Parliament). Like two years ago, when the difference was made by few percent, Igor Dodon remains a personality adored by one part of the population and challenged by another, also because of his often-tough message in relation to the West, against the background of a very warm relationship with Moscow. At the same time, Igor Dodon says he had a balanced external position in these years, restoring the "friendship with Russia" and opting for "a balance in relations with the East and the West". Read in the interview below about the foreign policy and the role that the head of state intends to play in the coming years in this respect.

■ ***Mr President, it has just been two years since you became head of state. How would you characterize this period? What are the successes and failures - of yours, of the country, and of the society?***

■ These two years have been an important period, which de facto paved the way for the next stage - the takeover of the governance by the socialist and 'statelist' left at the next parliamentary elections. From 2014 onwards, the socialists have obtained step by step a strong fraction in Parliament, then a large fraction in the Chisinau Municipal Council, then the country's president. We are also going to get the parliamentary majority in 2019 and then things in the country will change very quickly and for the better. As far as my successes as head of state are concerned, I presented them all in a comprehensive activity report a few months ago. The next report will be made public at the end of December and will provide a comprehensive review of these two years of activity.

I am the president of all those who want a Moldova which is 'statelist', neutral, territorially integral, Christian, and balanced...

■ ***To what extent have you succeeded in becoming a president for all? If so, in which way? If not, why not?***

■ For all those who want a Moldova which is 'statalist', neutral, territorially integral, Christian, balanced, and the heart of the Moldovan people? I think I have become the president of those people. And I also believe that many of the citizens who once had only right-wing, pro-European and unionist options appreciate my actions and gestures in the area of domestic and foreign policy. Being a president for all is an intention, a way, a commitment as a head of state, and an objective I've always followed, even though nowhere in the world this objective has been ever and by anyone 100% fulfilled ... I would also like to mention that before I took the office of head of state, but especially after that, I've had hundreds of meetings with the citizens of the Republic of Moldova - during my visits in the raions and villages of the country, in the context of communication with the diaspora, when I was abroad - I have responded to multiple concrete, social and economic demands. And today I am emotionally pleased that I could meet most of those requests. So, ask those citizens if I am their president and you will get the most objective answer.

■ *In this context, to what extent do your critical and sometimes even intolerant attitude towards certain categories of persons or minority groups contribute to the internal cohesion of our country?*

■ If you refer to the virulent unionists, to those who advocate for the disappearance of the Republic of Moldova through its territorial annexation, I declare that in my attitude towards them I only respect the Constitution of the country and fulfil my political duties of being the guarantor of sovereignty and of protecting the authenticity of the Moldovan people.

By the way, I would advise you to investigate how "tolerant" Romanians, Hungarians or Spaniards are towards

those who jeopardize the security and integrity of their countries - you will see that we still have a long way to reach the degree of "tolerance" of the authorities of those states in similar cases... If you are trying to be the advocate of the sexual minorities, I urge you to tell me in which way homosexuals, the LGBT movement contribute in general to the internal cohesion of our country? Or, on the contrary, to what extent does my promotion of the values of the traditional family constitute an act of intolerance vis-à-vis those minorities? You can do it in writing in any article on your portals if you have any arguments and desire for it. I reiterate: I will continue to firmly advocate for our statehood and territorial integrity and for the values of the traditional family. It is my right as a citizen and my duty as the country's president to protect these values against any threats whether "minority" or not.

We will return to the Agreement in 2019 when we get the parliamentary majority

■ *Have you succeeded or not to fulfil your key commitments such as fighting the oligarchy or denouncing the Association Agreement with the EU? What have been the reforms that you have focused on over these years and where, de facto, have you been ignored by the executive and legislative powers?*

■ Cancellation of the Association Agreement with the EU has not been announced as an objective in the presidential election campaign. In addition, it is also outside the remit of the presidential institution. Personally, however, I have expressed on several occasions my critical position on several components of this Agreement, in particular, on the economic aspect. The major problem of the Agreement is that it was unconditionally accepted without taking into account the interests of our country. This has led to a serious

imbalance in the export and import markets, to the detriment of the domestic producer. The situation has to be corrected, because thousands of Moldovan producers bear enormous losses every year. So, we will get back to the agreement when we get the parliamentary majority in 2019, and there is no doubt that, following the negotiations with Brussels, it is going to be re-drafted and adapted to the economic needs of the Republic of Moldova.

Otherwise, with regard to the fight against the oligarchy and the relationship of the Presidency with the executive and legislative powers, everyone saw it that in my capacity as head of state I opposed whenever it was possible the initiatives that I considered inappropriate. Although my legal powers have been reduced, I have taken political stance and have stood firmly against the abusive actions of the Democratic government in power, with whom I've had many confrontations. It is precisely because of my opposition to the government - as much as my powers have allowed me - that I've been suspended several times with the help of the Government and the docile Constitutional Court...

In addition, if you look at the agenda of this legislature, you will find out that most of the social and economic initiatives of the Socialist MPs have been rejected by the pro-European parliamentary majority solely on political grounds and despite the fact they were very useful for citizens. There are dozens of projects ... So, obviously, with such an approach of the majority, we only have to wait for the time when we finally remove it from power. I think you will agree with me that over the last years the government has compromised itself definitively and that, despite all the administrative levers and media sources it has benefited from, it has failed to increase its social support. This creates serious prerequisites for

the change of power on February 24 - a change that we all want.

■ *At the meeting with the representatives of the diplomatic corps accredited in Chisinau in early October, you reiterated your conviction that the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova has to be equally balanced with the East and the West. How are you ensuring this balance, in the situation where the paths have led you to the East? What should be our priorities in the East/ the West?*

■ I was present there, where the Republic of Moldova most needed me, where the serious foreign policy mistakes made by the current Democratic government had to be corrected. I reiterate that if I hadn't been personally and seriously involved in restoring the good relations with the Russian Federation, our country would have had huge economic and social losses. However, I have managed to relaunch a large part of our exports to Russia as well as to achieve amnesty for tens and thousands of Moldovan migrants working in this country. Also, we have maintained an agreeable level of Moldovan-Russian diplomatic relations and we have identified new dimensions for economic cooperation in the near future. We had important meetings also with the Western leaders in the EU. I've been received on an official visit by the Pope of Rome, who is the leading moral authority of the West and I had bilateral talks with the French President Emmanuel Macron, who invited me to visit France officially. We have established very positive and warm relations with the Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Those who are following my presidential work may notice that I am striving to maintain regular dialogue with representatives and various political leaders in various Western countries. My wish is to ensure a balance in the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova, to correct the imbalance created in 2009 by the Euro-union governments.

On the Transnistrian issue, it is wise that we are working with the main geopolitical actors

■ *How pleased are you with the latest developments in the Transnistrian settlement? Could the unfreezing of the relations with Ukraine bring a positive element in the dialogue with Tiraspol?*

■ Some tensions have disappeared and past animosities have been diminished in the Chisinau-Tiraspol relations. And in such conflicts, it is positive when things do not get worse and the regions stop moving away from each other. And I want to assure you that, in these years, some Transnistrian alienation processes have been stopped. The role of the Russian Federation is especially important here as well as the fact that Ukraine has understood it is better to contribute to maintaining the Transnistrian region in the sphere of influence of Chisinau. At my first meeting with the Kiev senior officials on this issue, I will present my vision regarding further developments in the Transnistrian settlement. I am convinced that the Ukrainian side will appreciate how I will present the perspectives.

■ *Will you continue to deny Russia's status as aggressor state in the 1992 conflict in the Republic of Moldova and in the current conflict in Ukraine?*

■ Throwing stones is a matter of the past. Now it is time to collect the stones and to understand the importance of this as a society. We can no longer afford to live with the past, and if we want to solve some fundamental state problems such as the Transnistrian one it is wise that we work positively and efficiently with the main geopolitical actors that can help us. One of them is the Russian Federation and I want to tell you with all responsibility that today it wants complete and peaceful resolution in accordance with the international framework of the Transnistrian conflict.

Moreover, similar signals are being sent also by countries in the West. But it depends a lot on the political will in Chisinau if we use this window of opportunity or not.

■ *What will be your position in the event of a new federalization project for the Republic of Moldova, as many experts say it is in the making in the Kremlin? What about the Russian military presence?*

■ First of all, federalization, as a system of state organization, is a concept of old traditions that was successfully applied a few centuries ago. Let us remember that federalists contributed to the founding of the United States of America, Switzerland, and Russia, even Germany (where your organization resides) are federative countries and it is not ruled out that certain European countries with regions requiring broad autonomy will choose the federalization path. So, it would be better not to turn the federalization idea into an ideological scarecrow as such an approach cannot be embraced by any serious and objective analytical or journalistic centers ... Then any such project - federalization or whatever it may be called - will have to be accepted and approved both by Chisinau and Tiraspol. So, again, it is not right to insinuate that Moscow is imposing it on us. Nobody imposes anything, and, in general, we are not the old ones to accept such policies either by the East or the West ... As far as my position as head of state is concerned, I am going to support those projects that will ensure a smooth, organic and realistic integration of the Transnistrian region into the country's body.

About the case of Turkish teachers ask SIS and the parliamentary majority

■ *In October you attended the Erevan Francophonie Summit and in November*

you went to Paris at the invitation of the Elisee tenant. What was this visit about? What did you discuss with Mr. Emmanuel Macron - a convinced pro-European and a devoted promoter of individual freedoms?

■ Both in Erevan and in Paris I talked not only with Emmanuel Macron, but also with other important heads of state, including the US President Donald Trump. Generally speaking, the spectrum of the dialogue is vast and addresses aspects specific to the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the countries represented by the leaders I am discussing with. One of the key issues I am addressing is, of course, the territorial reunification of our country through the final settlement of the Transnistrian issue in a format that excludes any forced scenario and corresponds fully to the international standards and practices. I want to assure you that this issue arouses vivid interest among all country leaders, whether from Europe and pro-European ones, from Eurasia or from more distant realms.

■ ***What is on your external relations agenda? What will be the priorities of the Presidency and to what extent will they be synchronized with the Government priorities?***

■ In recent months, I have made my stance on foreign policy very clear - balance in relations with the West and the East. Let us re-establish good relations with the Russian Federation (seriously damaged by the Euro-unionist governments) and at the same time keep our partnerships with the Western countries in a mutually respectable format. You probably realize that such a foreign policy priority doesn't correspond to the Government strategy which, on the contrary, is promoting a furious propaganda campaign against Russia and burning enough bridges to the East that I'm trying to restore. And in the relationship with the West all the governments since 2009 had a servant,

subordination behaviour which is compromising for the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova. Ironically, all these governments have disappointed mostly the Westerners.

For the next year I have several goals that I'm going to announce at the right time. We need also to take into account the impact of the parliamentary elections whose results may seriously influence my political emphasis in 2019. So it's early to give details ... Certainly the statehood, the resolution of the Transnistrian problem, promotion of a balanced foreign policy, interethnic conciliation, protection of the Christian and of the traditional family values will always remain in the top of my priorities. By the way, we declared 2019 the Year of the Family and we are going to develop a very serious national programme to support families, promote natality, and good education of children.

■ ***The drama of Turkish teachers from the "Orizont" High School may accompany you both internally and externally. How are you going to manage this problem that you are accused of by a part of the society and that you claim not to be your responsibility? Did you discuss this issue during your meeting with the Turkish President Recep Erdogan who has visited Chisinau recently?***

■ I have already answered this question, but I see that I have to repeat myself. Unfortunately, some citizens and even media have become victims of manipulations launched in the public space right after the Turkish citizens were detained. In reality, the Presidency has nothing to do with the detention and expulsion of teachers, and any accusations against the presidential institution - such as violation of human rights or hidden arrangements with Turkish officials - are totally groundless. I also want to remind you that the detention operation was carried out by the Security and Intelligence Service

(SIS), a structure subordinated to Parliament. For, as early as December 2016, the SIS was abusively transferred from the subordination of the head of state to that of the so-called pro-European parliamentary majority in order to prevent me from any control over this very important institution.

Ever since September I asked for the most complete information on this case to inform myself on all the premises and arguments that have led to such a tough gesture towards the Turkish citizens, but not even today can I say I have complete knowledge of the situation. So, I recommend that you read the questions to those who control today the force bodies in the Republic of Moldova, including the SIS, the so-called pro-European parliamentary majority, in order to learn from them how it happened that the SIS which is entirely subordinated to the parliament organized such an operation in such a style.

Obviously, I addressed the issue during the visit to Chisinau of the President Recep Erdogan. He told me that was a secret service investigation. Therefore, please don't seek direct or indirect links between the aforementioned case and the renovation of the Presidency building, which was destroyed on 7 April 2009 by the pro-European and unionist forces in a coup attempt. Renovation of the building was officially discussed in 2017 during the Moldovan-Turkish dialogue and is an initiative of the Turkish side, in particular, of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In order not to split the society and create confusion, May 9 should be the Victory Day

■ ***In the autumn, at the meeting of the CIS Heads of State Council in Dushanbe, you spoke of the need for a strategy for a "common Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok." Is it about bringing***

Europe to the CIS or expanding CIS in Europe?

■ Let's just not limit ourselves to clichés, especially when it comes to geopolitics. If it was possible a few decades ago to bring together different countries and regions in the EU format, why cannot we admit that in the future it will be possible to build an enlarged geopolitical space common to the EU and the CIS, without any of these entities to be assimilated by the other one and disappear? I have referred namely to such an extended project that doesn't have a center of gravity at one or another pole, but operates on the basis of parity, respect and mutual interest.

■ ***In this context - and in the context of the law you announced you are going to promulgate - do you really think that 9 May as Europe Day excludes 9 May as Victory Day? Perhaps, instead of splitting, this day could be a day of civic unification?***

■ In order not to create division and confusion and not to hurt the feelings of hundreds of thousands of people who associate the 9th of May with holy memories of relatives who went through the war and of victory and liberation from fascism, and precisely in order not to undo the importance of a deep-rooted holiday and replace it with another for which there are no collective feelings yet, I did not agree to promulgate this law. May 9th is the Victory Day, the day that symbolizes the struggle of our grandparents and grand grandparents against the fascists, at the cost of so many human lives, so many injured and grieving victims ... And it is neither ethical nor moral to diminish the exclusiveness of this holiday by doubling or tripling it with other holidays on the same day.

For the upcoming elections, our goal is to take over the government

■ ***What are your plans, your strategy and your expectations from the 2019***

parliamentary elections? What are the minimum and maximum goals?

■ I think the things may develop along three basic scenarios. According to the first scenario, which is very likely, the Socialists take over the government with their own forces and assume the leadership of the state according to the priorities they announced at the November 18th Assembly, when tens of thousands of people approved the programmatic, socioeconomic and political theses proposed by PSRM. The second scenario is about a new Euro-Unionist coalition with the support and direct pressure of the West, as it was in 2009-2010 and 2014. A kind of AEI 4. This means creating a post-election coalition between PDM, PAS, and PDA. For there were situations before when right-wing parties fought between themselves before the elections, pretending to be irreconcilable enemies, and then created "concrete alliances." After all, the third scenario involves early elections, in the event that neither the Socialists separately nor PDM + PAS + PDA succeed in forming the Government. The fate of such early elections is hard to predict, but I am absolutely convinced that the PSRM will have an improved electoral result, because the people are fed up with the chaos, with the anti-social governments of the Euro-Unionists, and with all sorts of conjuncture coalitions.

So if it is to answer the question directly, the maximum goal is to take over the government with a majority of the Socialists in the legislative forum, while the minimum goal is to have sufficient mandates and enough influence to prevent a new, disastrous Euro-unionist Alliance for the Republic of Moldova.

■ ***The new "pro-Moldova" doctrine announced on October 21st this year by PDM seems to be inspired by the PSRM messages. Is this change of optics an electoral threat to your party? How do you explain this turn of the PDM - if we can call it a turn?***

■ Both the "pro-Moldova" doctrine and the idea of the referendum for reducing the number of MPs as well as other initiatives of the PDM, including those of the Chisinau Municipal Council, is direct plagiarism of either the PSRM projects or mine as head of state. This means the democrats are in crisis of ideas, do not have their own consistent political vision, no longer enjoy the support of the right-wing electorate, which is why they are trying to expand to the left. De facto, the honesty of the PDM is very easy to test through two or three concrete questions. If you are pro-Moldova, do you accept the "History of Moldova" course in schools? Do you accept to ban by law the anti-state and *anti-Moldovan* unionism? Do you agree to leave intact the art. 13 of the Moldovan Constitution on Moldovan language, a language spoken by most Moldovans?

I am afraid we will receive negative answers to these questions, because in reality, the Democrats are just camouflaging themselves, borrowing ideas from others in order to be more attractive before elections. But who else believes them?! All their electoral support is due to the administrative leverages they exert on officials, but in elections people will vote as they know, not as dictated from above.

■ ***How do you see the country you are leading but also the world in two years' time, at least at the end of your first presidential term?***

■ Moldova has a future! Here's the forecast for two or twenty years, or decades and decades ahead. I hope people's life will be more decent, and there will be more people at home, and the country will start the process of territorial integration, the society will act in solidarity and reconciliation with itself and with others. I hope it is so and we will be working for that.

■ ***Thank you for the interview.***

Sorina Ștefăruță

Editorial

The more ways, the less Euro-integration

Victoria Bucătaru,
Executive director, Foreign Policy Association



The East-West controversy in the public discourse of the political elites in Chisinau is finally taking new shape after years of wondering how to handle the geopolitical factor and influences. De facto, the insular policy of the Republic of Moldova which is currently promoted and which bears an authoritarian character, relying on serious democratic slippages, seems to have changed its narrative. Moreover, today we speak less about the European or Eurasian way, invoking instead the “Pro-Moldova” course - the “fourth way”...

Less than a decade has passed since the Republic of Moldova welcomed in Chisinau the exponents of the great Euro-Atlantic powers, showing major interest in taking over the values and the functioning principles of the democratic states with tradition. The visits of Chancellor Angela Merkel and Vice President of the United States, Joe Biden, have not only astonished the society, which was still accustomed to the Russian leaders (who, by the way, still have top positions in Moldovan preferences), but also have offered the hope of a democratic transition that could be completed. But it wasn't to happen, unfortunately, as things started to degrade.

Moreover, the recent visits of the Belarusian leader Aleksandr Lukashenko and of the Turkish President Recep Erdoğan - who somehow substituted the Euro-Atlantic leaders that seem to have refused to come to Chisinau - do change the reality. There can be various reasons for that: from unreformed political elites and society with deep Soviet convictions to the disillusion of colour or “social media” revolutions. That we cannot know exactly. But one thing is certain now: in the course of a few months, the pro-European message has been distorted and excluded from internal and external policy priorities. The consequences are clear - we are progressively moving away from the European dream, we are becoming even more vulnerable and, as a result, we are turning into a

light prey for those who have obscure interests and need a bridge to attack the country's immediate neighbours: Romania and Ukraine.

Romania is the first gateway to Europe for East Europeans, and due to its NATO membership, it is also the main fortress that provides regional and European security. Ukraine, in turn, being neither a member of the EU nor of NATO and having a direct border with the “big bear”, became, on the one hand, its first and easiest victim, and on the other

hand, the original protection shield for us as well as for the European Union. De facto, the recent clashes between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in the Black Sea Basin, the disputes over the Kerch Strait and the Azov Sea are just a few consequences of the less efficient management of the situation in 2014, which has led to the annexation of the Crimea. The East-West controversy, as well as the geopolitical influences, no longer have a theoretical or intellectual interest, but turn into profound existential problems with state survival notes.

Existential is also the state of affairs of the Republic of Moldova, which in times of regional or international crises, chooses to aggravate its situation through the inability to formulate its needs, but also to strategically manage the relations with its partners ready to offer their assistance. Leaving aside the relationship with the EU, we recall that in 2014 there was no common voice of the Chisinau authorities, political elites of our country, condemning the annexation of the Crimea. And there is still no common voice, after four years, to condemn the assaults in the Black Sea basin.

It is difficult to understand where this is the internal politics or foreign policy, or geopolitical calculations, or simple geostrategic assumptions. However, it is rather clear that this is about personal preferences or group interests and even political interests. And it is also clear this has nothing to do with the sense of representativeness of people.



NOVEMBER 2018

Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The 24th February elections could be contested way before the Election Day

Anatolie Golea, political analyst

Anatolie Golea is a reference name in the field of political expertise in the Republic of Moldova and a commentator (and executive director) of the Infotag news agency, who has accustomed us, every weekend, for quite some years already, to his interviews with representatives of the domestic political class. It happens at the talk-show "Friday with Anatolie Golea" on the RTR Moldova, one of the few Russian-language TV programmes that is trying to present the viewers with a different perspective on the political phenomena in our country. About these phenomena and their "interpretation" I have found out from Anatoly Golea himself in this interview...

■ **Mr. Golea, what are your thoughts about back home after the talk show? What do your guests, the future candidates for the parliament, say - where is the Republic of Moldova heading to?**

■ I have the impression that they too don't know exactly where the Republic of Moldova is going to and precisely because of this they are trying to invent new ways of developing the country, strategies, even doctrines, although the word "doctrines" is too much said. Doctrines have been just a few in history and saying that you have launched a doctrine is, at least, ambitious. The Republic of Moldova should have other ambitions - to defend its citizens, to create decent living conditions at home so that the people don't leave the country. Because all these ways the governors speak about - the unification



with Romania, the pro-European and the pro-Euro-Asian - finally end up in a single way: leaving the country in search of a better life. And I'm afraid the fourth way is not different from the other three, because it will lead us nowhere. The news that the pace of migration of the country has slowed down is no longer relevant, even if we admit they are true. Because in the case of a three-million population, there is simply no one left to migrate.

■ **People are continuing to leave the country - and the first picture is the one of a family with four children that the TVs have reported about in their news. Six people at once!**

■ I've also seen the news and it speaks about people's (un) trust in what is happening here. I'm following this exodus on the basis of social networks and above all, based on the reaction of young people. After every defiant gesture of the government - and you cannot say it, for example, that the

failure to recognize the elections for the Chisinau mayorality is a decision of the judiciary and not one of the government - more young people say they will be leaving the country. And some of them are already doing it... So I find it difficult to say what is happening today in the Republic of Moldova. The politicians are preparing for elections, that's what's happening. And until then, there are still a few things that the government needs to sort out.

The Governance is continuing to defy the development partners

■ **What are these things?**

■ First of all, the capital amnesty (it is until February 1 in order to manage until the elections); privatizations (possibly there will be more than "Air Moldova"); the small tax reform that came into force on 1 October (we will see it later what the consequences at the macro-financial level will be, but for people and the economy it is beneficial) or the wage increases on 1 December (although such reforms are normally implemented from 1 January). The effects of the latter will only be felt after the New Year, so precisely closer to the election day. Where from will they get money after the elections? I do not know - I don't rule out that they are acting according to "either we win or ... after elections come what may". But for now, I think these reforms that have been well thought out in terms of party strategy will have their say in the electoral process.

■ **However, these "well-thought-out" strategies are equally well-criticized**

by the European partners on whom at least formally, the government is relying on. Is it rational to put so much emphasis on party strategies and to ignore everything else?

■ The current government has consciously damaged the relations with the European partners - relationships that have been meticulously built for years ... When they tried but failed to find common language on the modification of the electoral system, they neglected completely the opinion of the Venice Commission, the OSCE, the European Union and of all other development partners. I have the feeling that it was then that they made the decision: our goal is to win the election and we will see it after what we can do about it. And we could see what followed after - harsh statements, cancelling of the electoral results in Chisinau. They actually got their feet in the door: we don't recognize it and that's it!.. And that happened when we had perhaps the most sympathetic and correct elections, applauded for having succeeded in detaching from the geopolitical message. But this foot in the door was a defiance of both domestic and foreign public opinion.

■ ***It is true that in the EU, today, no discussion on the Republic of Moldova takes place without reminding us of the cancellation of results of the local elections. The most recent proof to that is the November 14 Resolution of the European Parliament.***

■ The Resolution from 14 November is a logical continuation of the one from 5 July. Very tough, both confirm once more that the 100 million euros - which, for a year or so is coming and not longer coming to Chisinau - will only come here provided we pass the test of the next elections. For the time being, however, the government continues to defy the development partners – it has adopted the small tax reform, the law

on capital amnesty, the citizenship by investments, and so on. So there is no doubt that the stake is the election and maintaining power. The new coalition and the government will be formed no earlier than at the end of April, and in May elections will take place in the European Parliament, with all the processes stemming from it: the new EU Legislature, the new composition of the European Commission, etc. In the autumn, at best, Brussels will remember about the Republic of Moldova. And here the stake I think is simple. They will go to Brussels and say, "Look, we are the government chosen by the people. Let's start from a white page, start from scratch. We stopped the coming of Russian tanks, we didn't allow Dodon to ride on a white horse in Chisinau and Moldova, it is us that the people chose and it is with us that you need to negotiate. And it is also desirable to give us money".

This "Pro-Moldova" was originally the Communists' idea

■ ***Phantasmagorical stakes, as if there is no memory in Brussels. By the way, why did Igor Dodon allow to be deprived of the 'pro-Moldova' idea as originally this has been his idea?***

■ This 'pro-Moldova' was originally the Communists' idea. Well back in 2008, PCRM included in the party's statute that they had to achieve the European modernization of the Republic of Moldova according to European standards. This meant 'pro-Moldova'. Afterwards, on August 27, 2017, on Independence Day, Igor Dodon came up with a pro-Moldova prominent message, which, in his opinion, meant statehood, neutrality and Euro-Asian integration, but also openness to the West. Because after 2016, when he won the presidential seat, promising to denounce the Association Agreement with the European Union, Igor Dodon is no longer talking about denunciation. He

talks only about collaboration with the East and the West. This message is being promoted almost daily.

■ ***Europe from Vladivostok to Lisbon with the centre of gravity in Chisinau...***

■ Yes, the presidency has been improvising a lot lately ... But getting back to the 'pro-Moldova' I think the Democratic Party has tried to take over this message because it seemed to be less compromised. For neither the Socialists nor the Communists have compromised this idea insofar as the so-called European parties have compromised the European course or the unionist parties have compromised the unionist idea. In addition, this fourth way is also a stretched hand to Igor Dodon, who has said that the Socialists can only create coalitions with 'pro-Moldova' parties. Now Dodon has obviously also changed saying the PDM is not genuinely "pro-Moldova". Let's wait and see, but these two parties have somewhat met each other halfway. Igor Dodon says they are open to cooperate with both the East and the West; PDM says they are "pro-Moldova", which means the same thing... But how the things are going to change after the elections and where they will get the money to cover the expenses which are really very high, nobody knows that.

■ ***Perhaps, from the investments by citizenship...***

■ We do not know and I'm afraid we will not find out who are the de facto beneficiaries of this initiative. Sometimes I have the impression it has been adopted for some well-known people who had to legalise their capital. In the EU, during about five-year period, about 6,000 people have been granted citizenship by investment in countries such as Great Britain, Malta, Cyprus, which provide some serious fiscal facilities. That is why, personally, I don't think they will be queuing to receive the

citizenship of the Republic of Moldova. Probably there will be Arabs, some Russians... Probably a certain amount of money is going to come, but that will not be that significant as to save the budget. This is going to be the concern of the next government, which will also be with the PDM participation.

■ **What could and should this government do in order to improve at least a little bit its image externally? Could adherence to the Magnitsky Pact be a solution, for example?**

■ I do not think a gesture of this kind would mean anything.

Moldova's file exists, it's not going to disappear and nobody is going to tear sheets from it

■ **You've mentioned the Chisinau's stake in starting everything from scratch in the relationship with the EU after the European elections in May. How easy is to get a "carte blanche"?**

■ I don't believe it, but it seems the political technologists of the Democratic Party do. I often speak with the Europeans, who are smiling diplomatically hearing such ideas. The file of the Republic of Moldova exists, it's not going to disappear and nobody is going to tear sheets from it; all the "achievements" are going to remain intact. Also in Brussels, with the elections, the mid-level officials will not change - so they will remember who, what, how and why they did in Chisinau. In addition, I am convinced that the new composition of the European Parliament will be much more Eurosceptic, and more careful with the money for the EU neighbours. So it is going to be a lot harder and the "carte blanche" is not going to help us. Remember, for example, how elegantly Chancellor Angela Merkel treated us with silence

in her message in Tbilisi at the end of the summer when she spoke about "different type of relations" with the EU for Georgia and Ukraine. This "silence" speaks volumes- we risk to become even more "unobserved" for a longer time. It is much harder to restore the relationships than to ruin them. But it seems that no one has thought of it when, out of big urgency, they altered the electoral system, an action followed by more and more derogations from democratic norms.

■ **Instead, they are trying to demonstrate their attachment to the European idea through referendums on this subject...**

■ The initiative of the speaker Andrian Candu's on a referendum on European integration was more of a blackmail against other pro-European parties. PDM understands it very well that a possible referendum on this issue in the February 2019 elections could be a disaster for PDM as well. That would mean to throw the ball in the court of Igor Dodon and of the Socialist Party, who would enormously want such a poll in order to mobilize the anti-European electorate in elections. So I think this initiative was ad hoc announced in Parliament, after which, in two days' time, at the "great national assembly of the Democrats" on October 21, nothing was said about the referendum. And I think they will never talk about it... By the way, when Mr Candu made the announcement about the referendum, he didn't mention the word "consultative". Instead, Mr. Dodon did.

■ **What should Igor Dodon do to propel himself? For speaking in terms of image, the Democratic Party seems to be more visible now.**

■ Well, the Socialists organized a protest on November 18th in Chisinau against the oligarchs they have been fighting

for two years at least... But seriously, I do not think the socialists aren't sufficiently visible. On the contrary, they act very well on their traditional segments in the territory. In Chisinau, for example, they build playgrounds and sports grounds as well as lay asphalt in the yards and streets on the municipal budget, the PSRM candidates being present everywhere. The candidates for the Parliamentary elections have already been announced, which is a violation as the election campaign is starting only on December 24th. The candidates are already in the territory, working with people. The Democratic Party, to my surprise, has not nominated its candidates yet. It seems they think it is too early and that we are going to have very many surprises until the elections. Very many.

Elections could be invalidated by local courts anywhere

■ **Do you mean controversial and dubious candidates? Is this a surprise, since we already have a condemned mayor and everyone is happy?**

■ We are going to have dubious candidates, that's what I think. And, in the given context, I don't rule out that on February 24, 2019, we could face an absolutely new situation when the elections will not be monitored by international bodies seriously on the voting day, because they are going to be recognized as fraudulent before that. It is going to happen if integrity certificates are not issued to certain candidates, others are not registered, while candidates such as Ilan Shor will be admitted. I feel that by February 24th lots of strange, antidemocratic and anti-European things are going to happen, like in the story of the "Open Dialogue" which tells us that if it is not removed from the electoral race, the Opposition will surely be harassed. In addition, a very dangerous precedent

was created at the Chisinau mayoral elections, when a de facto validated vote was cancelled. Let us imagine what can happen in the 51 constituencies! We will not even be able to follow closely what is happening in Vulcanesti or Gagauzia, let alone Transnistria. Elections could be invalidated by local courts anywhere. Under the law, if elections are declared void in more than 1/3 of the constituencies - in 17 out of 51 – early general elections are announced. But if the elections are invalidated in 15 constituencies, that is going to be OK. And then, what is going to happen next? Who guarantees that in the case a candidate doesn't suit the Power, they are not going to invalidate the results of the elections and organize new elections or, possibly, they are not going to recognize as winner the candidate who comes second?

■ ***What could be the local electoral impact of President Dodon's activation on the international stage on his party? Is it an ambition or a strategy?***

■ Igor Dodon likes to be a traveling president, and he is happy to accept any invitation - either private or official. But the problem remains: the foreign partners have great suspicions about Moldova, and President Igor Dodon, because of his often pro-Eastern and anti-EU discourse, is part of this problem. You have probably noticed

that no European commissioners or officials from Brussels or Strasbourg have visited Moldova recently. At the same time, Mr Dodon's visits are not so full of content and also the Presidency hasn't had many guests over the last two years. Yes, certain circumstances have been created- the summits that have been largely formal - the traditional Francophonie, the Paris Forum dedicated to the end of the First World War, to which Emmanuel Macron invited around 100 Heads of State from around the world. But that is too little for a pro-active foreign policy. Personally, I see nothing wrong with the fact that Igor Dodon meets with the President of the Russian Federation and tries to solve certain problems or with other presidents if this is not to the detriment of the country and does not end up with the extradition of certain teachers. What is really bad, however, is the fact that the head of state has failed to establish any friendly relations or cooperation with Romania and Ukraine. There is a saying that you cannot choose your neighbours or your parents. It seems, however, that President Dodon is working for his electorate, for whom it is not a serious thing that, at the presidential level, we have no relationship with either Bucharest or Kiev.

■ ***Speaking of Kiev, what should Moldovan diplomacy and possibly the head of state do as a result of the new***

Russian-Ukrainian military escalation?

■ The Moldovan diplomacy has reacted. Prime Minister Pavel Filip and Speaker Andrian Candu made statements. But I do not think that's enough. It seems (and this is confirmed by sociological surveys) we are not fully aware of the risks and challenges to state security, which can arise both from the unresolved conflict on the Nistru and the unstable regional situation. And in the situation where, de facto, we don't have a functional army, we don't have modern weapons to ensure the security and defense capability of the state ... More than that - we argue with our neighbours, the president of the Republic of Moldova doesn't speak to his counterparts over the Prut and Nistru, and the political class is promoting a stupid neutrality on the right bank of the Nistru, while military applications with the use of modern weapons are taking place on the left bank of the river... We need a secured security, and not a declared one. And the reform of the army should be real, not mimicked. They have declared the transfer to a professional army and contract-based enrolment. For now, however, no one knows whether this army is going to be just "professional" or also functional...

■ ***Thank you for the interview.***

Sorina Ștefăruță

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