

Foreign Policy Association together with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 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

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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



"Romania is more than a friend and a partner for the Republic of Moldova. This is a relationship of the people that share a common linguistic and cultural space. Our objective is to increase this space and connect it to a common infrastructure. Thus, the connection between our states will become even deeper" said the Prime Minister Pavel Filip in his message on the occasion of the National Day of Romania marked on December 1st. He thanked the Romanian side for the permanent support provided to our country, including on the European dimension, and stressed that the special relationship between Chisinau and Bucharest is confirmed by dozens of concrete energy, road, education, electronic communications and drinking water supply projects. In his turn, HE Romanian Ambassador Daniel Ionita mentioned that the Republic of Moldova is a privileged strategic partner and will be further supported in its European aspirations, including during the Bucharest European mandate.



Parliament Speaker Andrian Candu invited members of the US Senate and House of Representatives to monitor the upcoming Moldovan elections in order to convince themselves of the correctness of the electoral process and of the voting itself. Also, during his meetings in Washington where he has paid a working visit recently, he asked for support to deal with hybrid threats and strengthen the state institutional capacity to respond to the current security risks. In this context, Andrian Candu referred to the media, the banking, the energy system, the Nistru security zone as well as to the political area and the direct and camouflaged external implications as priority areas in the case of a hybrid war. The US Senators have expressed concern over the threats facing the Republic of Moldova and have stated that the USA will continue to support our country in its aspiration to be part of the Western civilization.



At the end of November, in Bucharest, Andrian Candu discussed about the security risks also with the accredited Romanian ambassadors for Moldova. The main topics of internal and regional relevance were addressed. In particular, the speaker spoke about the measures taken by authorities to ensure security against hybrid threats. In this context, he announced the intention to set up a Strategic Coordination Center for Combating Hybrid Threats, a project which is being developed together with Ukraine and Georgia. At the same time, Andrian Candu highlighted the need for solidarity in relation to the common security challenges and encouraged the EU to engage bilaterally and at the European level in joint projects to tackle the hybrid threats.



Our country's cooperation within the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the promotion of confidence-building measures in the Transnistrian settlement process, the integration of national minorities, the justice reform and the consolidation of the rule of law, the 2019 parliamentary elections were the main topics of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Tudor Ulianoschi, with the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly George Tsereteli. During a meeting held on the margins of the meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Milan, Minister Tudor Ulianoschi appreciated the OSCE support in withdrawal of the Russian troops and munitions from the territory of our country, relying in particular on the political declaration adopted at the last meeting of this parliamentary forum.

The sixth edition of the European Integration Debate Forum: where we were and where we are (not)?



Sorina Ștefârță

"Towards a European Future for Moldova" - that was the title of the Sixth edition of the European Integration Debate Forum held on November 20th in Chisinau. Decision makers from the Republic of Moldova and the European Union, politicians and local and

foreign opinion leaders, representatives of political parties and international bodies, members of civil society and journalists - the participation was vast and diverse, this annual event succeeding in establishing itself as a comprehensive discussion platform on the progress made by the Republic of Moldova in the process

of European integration. Because it is also curious, but especially useful to see where you are - if you made progress - after one year...

Among the topics discussed at the Forum were the traditional, but always the topical and even unpredictable - as showed particularly

► by the current year - the relationship between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union; the reforms in the field of justice, the fight against corruption, the Transnistrian settlement, but also in the area of freedom of speech and democratic governance. Starting from these topics, the key question of the Forum was both simple and complex: **“How can we regain the trust of European partners and maintain the support of the political class and of the society as a whole for the European integration goal?”**.

At the same time, the organizers - the Foreign Policy Association and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Moldova, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration - addressed the new challenges of the time. Therefore a separate panel was dedicated to the problem of hybrid threats to the security of the Republic of Moldova and of the resilience of the state institutions of the country. The issue is as topical as the events that happened less than one week after the Forum in the Kerch Strait of the Azov Sea have shown us that the challenges at best “hibernate”, but don’t disappear.

What was not good or could have been better? Several participants noted that the current edition of the Forum benefited from a reduced presence of Moldovan top-level representatives - less than ever and too little for the pro-European ambitions that the current government is claiming to develop... So that, volens-nolens, all the questions and reproaches had to be answered by the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Iurie Leanca. What he said, what the guest speakers such as HE Peter Michalko or Ion Sturza tried to convey and what the messages for Moldova of the European Union were at the end of the year were, find out from the 11th edition of the foreign policy newsletter.

We are trying to re-consolidate the relationship, keep the dance and even harmonize again our steps with the EU

Iurie Leancă, Vice Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova



The presence of the Deputy Prime Minister Iurie Leanca at the Annual European Integration Debate Forum on November 20th was really awaited at this conference edition. Above all, by virtue of the position of Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, which he has been exercising for almost a year. Also, in his capacity of former Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (2009-2013) and former Prime Minister (2013-2014). During his mandate, the Republic of Moldova obtained the abolition of visas for the EU, signed the Association Agreement and started the implementation of the Free Trade Area with the EU. But especially - being the only high-ranking representative of the government - Iurie Leanca, a participant in the Forum, was expected to explain the

current state of the relationship between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union and how the authorities see the future of this relationship which is quite deteriorated today. The Deputy Prime Minister Iurie Leanca discussed about the present and future also a few weeks later, during a tour in Cluj, Budapest and Vienna, which served as a starting point for the interview we invite you to read below.

■ **Mr Leanca, you have just come back from a tour in several EU countries. Do these visits have a specific purpose or are they part of the effort to re-establish the partnerships for the tango that, to quote you, is being danced in two - and which in the last year has not been really danced in the relationship with the European Union?**

■ We still need this tango with the EU, especially since the hug has been indeed quite weak. And if you stay alone, with no support, you risk falling and hitting yourself ... That’s why we are trying to re-consolidate the relationship, keep the dance and even harmonize our steps again so that it is both beautiful and effective for both partners. The visit to the three states was interesting for several reasons. This time, Romania meant Cluj, where I went at the invitation of Vasile Pușcaș, former chief negotiator for adherence of the neighbouring country to the EU. I have realised again - in Cluj, but

also in Budapest and Vienna - that the Austro-Hungarian Empire has left its mark not only in the architecture of those places, but also in the way the people think. I was most impressed by the fact that their priority is belonging to a community - that of Cluj, the Transylvanian community - and this prevails over the ideological divergences. As a result, the political life seems to be much more civilized, and it is seldom that politicians appear to build their strategies on furious and scandalous attacks. We belong to another world, unfortunately, and that affects us, including the way we carry out polemics. We have remained provincial even after 27 years of independence- we are doing politics by attacking. If we claim to be part of the elites and take on certain responsibility, we should come up with solutions.

Nobody says we should be short-sighted of what's happening in Romania

■ ***You are saying it only two or three days after you published on Facebook a rather scandalous and furious attack, in my opinion, directed at the two Chişinău Opposition leaders, Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase. Why was that needed?***

■ I wouldn't call it 'furious'. Simply, being in Cluj really made me think about our situation of today and tomorrow... Because we are consuming our energy on petty harassment, not on debates about what we really want to build here, what the future of the Republic of Moldova should be, how to shorten to the maximum the transition period equivalent to so much suffering for Moldovans, how to find a niche in a regional and continental, social and economic contexts. We are

disadvantaged in relation to Romania, at least, because they are in the EU and the structural funds coming there are incomparably larger than what we can allocate. And then, how do we ensure that we have a GDP growth that will allow us to get out of the zone of the poorest countries in Europe?! These are the questions that should concern us and for which we should look for answers! In this context, I'd like to mention how impressed I was in Cluj by the Bessarabian students from the Faculty of European Studies of the "Babes-Bolyai" University whom I met – very well integrated, with a beautiful Romanian, speaking foreign languages, having a pragmatic and realistic view on their future and the Republic of Moldova...

■ ***A future they are unlikely to see at home...***

■ It's a problem which preoccupies dozens of countries today, it's not just ours. Also in Romania the people are looking for a better life, and there is not enough labour force in Cluj. Portuguese leave for Germany. Germans leave for the USA, while the Americans- to other parts of the world. We live in a global village and I still cannot get used to it. It is true that migration remains a great challenge for us, both for the preservation of our national identity and for the economic development and investment...

■ ***Let's get back to Romania. You have accused the leaders of the Moldovan opposition, because in their turn, they had accused Bucharest of complicity with the Moldovan government. Does this mean we should welcome everything is done in Bucharest? Or we should admit that there are issues also there, as there are issues in***

Hungary and Austria, which you have visited recently, as well as in other EU countries?

■ Nobody says we should be short-sighted of everything happening in Romania. Especially - and I hope no one will contest this - we need a strong Romania, with functional institutions, that enjoys credibility in the West. For when Romania is heard in Berlin, Washington and Brussels, it is going to be better for us too. The Western policies towards our region and, in particular, towards the Republic of Moldova, will depend heavily on Romania's ability to articulate its position and to come up with arguments in favour of one or another line of action. From this point of view, of course, all the animosities and all the struggles present in Romania are affecting to a certain extent its ability to impose its point of view, to be heard and supported in the West, especially now when Romania takes over the EU Presidency on 1 January 2019. But I don't think it is right or constructive to make from the Bucharest situation an element of internal politics in Chisinau. It is at least an act of irresponsibility. Firstly, because the position officially stated by the Foreign Ministry means this represents the position of the Romanian Government and the Romanian Presidency. In addition, Romania understands better than any other EU country what the stake of the game here is and the possible dangers. The opposition sees it narrowly and maybe it is natural to be so, its purpose being just to come to power. But they should evaluate the situation 1) if there is a chance for them to come to power, and 2) what happens if they don't come to power? What if the Socialists win the elections? While we can ignore the geopolitical context, I don't think Romania can afford this luxury.

The cancellation of the Chisinau elections' results has disrupted things internally, but also the attitude towards us externally

■ **Yet, whenever the Opposition says, externally, anything else than the government wants, the official Chişinău accuses the Opposition of harming the country ... You were once in opposition – isn't also this its role?**

■ The context it's what always matters. And the context shows that, following the negative developments of 2015-2016 within the EU, our number 1 supporter today is Romania. It is our chance to become a functional state and Romania is our biggest trading partner. That is why we have to insist that Bucharest develops a series of integration objectives for Moldova with the necessary resources allocated. And perhaps it is not necessary to use the word "unification", but to create premises for a unique space, interconnected on all segments - infrastructure, education, culture. What shape this is going to have in the end, remains to be seen. And it is important to support such an approach in Chisinau, at least, by those who claim to be Romanian and understand Romania's role in the region. A different approach is wrong, as was the PLDM and PL's refusal to vote for the setting of the European integration objective in the Constitution. As when are we going to have the chance of a two-thirds majority?!

■ **Why did then so many reasonable people, including some Europeans, see this initiative of PDM as an act of blackmail?**

■ Unfortunately, it has become so prevalent here: even when the ruling coalition or the PDM, which is its main

actor, does something good, it is bad. Apriori. We live in stereotypes. As far as the Europeans are concerned ... and I'm a convinced Europhile, but not always what Brussels or some of its exponents say is the ultimate truth. Otherwise, why in Ukraine the fixation of such an objective in the Constitution is good, and in our case - is not good? The same is with the European Parliament resolution: in the case of Georgia, they refer to art. 49 of the Treaty of Lisbon, while in our case, they talk about suspending the Association Agreement. This is blackmail, because it doesn't support the cause- it doesn't encourage either the citizens or the elites.

■ **These are the realities you are living in, including by virtue of the mandate you have been exercising since returning to the Government, in order to – as they used to say it then- correct things in the field of Euro-integration that others had spoiled. What have you managed to do this year?**

■ It has been a complicated year, which can be divided into two distinct stages: before and after the invalidation of the results of the Chisinau elections. This moment has disturbed things internally, but also the attitude towards us externally. Because until then the things seemed to be moving upwards: we had an active dialogue with the EU, including on technical segments such as aviation, energy interconnection, food safety. We were about to be disbursed the first instalment of European money ... Invalidation of the election was a strong blow and, as we have anticipated, the costs are still felt today. That is why our most important goal now is to maintain dialogue with the EU, focus on what we can improve until the February elections and on what should happen afterwards. So

the tasks have changed to a certain extent.

There is nothing new in „Hahn's list”

■ **What is the message you go with to the meetings, in this situation?**

■ The message is very simple: that now, when it is harder for us, we need plenary engagement from the EU and the West for the Republic of Moldova. We accept the criticism, but we also need positive signals where something really happens. And that, above all, we know how imperative it is to bring this reform of justice in order to ensure the rule of law. And my firm conviction is that without EU engagement, it will be very difficult for us to build a credible justice. And I also hope that those who will create the parliamentary majority after the elections will understand the need for a more nuanced dialogue in this regard.

So despite this difficult stage, the discussions I have with the decision-makers in the EU countries make me relatively optimistic about the perspectives of the Moldovan-EU relations. Compared to Ukraine and Georgia, our country is seen by several European politicians as having a greater chance of becoming faster member of the European Union. This is because almost half of our citizens are already European citizens, but also because we have made some progress in the economic and financial-banking reforms and the authorities are still making considerable efforts to meet their commitments towards the EU.

■ **Why then- if things move into a positive direction- you don't make public the 'Hahn's list', that the European Commissioner handed over to Prime Minister Pavel Filip? What's in it?**

■ The 'list' you are referring to reviews once again all our structural problems, which are old and far too well known. That's why we did not discuss whether to make it public or not. Instead, we analysed it with the responsible authorities and the first reactions were sent to the EU... And these reactions confirm that if we move much better in the economic and social sectors, we have new aspects and approaches when it comes to the functioning of certain institutions - especially those in the field of justice - although the legal framework has improved, the perception hasn't changed yet. But things have to be seen as a whole, and an example in this respect is the National Agency for Integrity (ANI), to whose consolidation I have tried to contribute. But here we face two problems: human resources - if you want to recruit *de facto* and not *de jure* 40 integrity inspectors who are also professionals - and the wages which are too low.

■ ***In general, how much understanding do you have, in the executive, on sensitive issues while communicating with the EU? For example, the controversial 'Citizenship by investment' which was criticized by the European partners and other international bodies...***

■ If is to refer just to this issue, I can tell you one thing: I am sorry we lost so much time and we didn't do it earlier in 2014, when the visa regime had just been abolished. We would have had a much greater advantage then, for we would have been the first in the region to offer such an opportunity. It is a common international practice and it would have been a shame not to take it over too. When recently a European commissioner accused me of adopting this programme, I asked him why it can exist in about ten European countries, and not in the Republic of Moldova. As

the European Union is a model - show it then to us through your own action that this is not good – otherwise don't criticize us for following an existing model in the EU.

■ ***Those ten countries are being criticized too. But I think it is also what you said earlier: the lack of credibility of justice, which can leave some gates open...***

■ I have addressed this issue several times with the involved institutions, including the Ministry of Economy, and I think there are enough filters for the law to prevent certain criminal structures from abusing it. That's no joke. Otherwise ... I have enough experience and ability to see it in a critical way where we are. I have never blamed the EU exclusively and I have always said that we have the biggest responsibility. But I would have liked it to be different - a more committed attitude on the part of the EU. Let us communicate not only through resolutions, but live, so that we can explain what we did and why we did. Our only chance today is dialogue.

It is useless to claim seriousness, when you are a persona non-grata even to your neighbours

■ ***Who do we count on today in the EU, apart from Romania?***

■ Traditionally, we will continue to focus on the Central European and Baltic countries. But, obviously, we are not going to succeed without a good understanding with Germany and France. So, we need to get back to a much more effective communication with these two capitals, who are certainly interested in the region and watching carefully what's happening.

■ ***Regarding the region, what is your perspective?***

■ I am very worried and the feeling persists both because of the news coming from the Azov Sea and Donbass, and the almost daily military manoeuvres taking place next to us on the Nistru. We have to be very vigilant, have close communication with the Ukrainians and with the West. Only co-ordinated policies of the West could compel Moscow not to vent.

■ ***What are the chances of President Dodon's 'East-West balance' policy?***

■ What kind of balance policy can we talk about when you are a small country and you have two bigger and stronger neighbours - politically, militarily, economically - than you and your head of state is a kind of persona non-grata in these two countries? Moscow is important, no one denies this fact, but Romania and Ukraine are much more important for the Republic of Moldova. It is useless to claim seriousness and foreign policy skills when you are a persona non grata even to your neighbours ... Seeing yourself with a Western leader by virtue of your function or in an extended event is too little. Instead, Mr. Dodon's frequent visits to Moscow and the commitments he takes there, in case, God forbid!, he takes over power in Chisinau, cannot but worry the West, which sustains the integrity of Ukraine and ours. And I am not referring only to the possible change of the internal and external policy orientation or to the fact that the Free Trade Zone would be endangered. His victory would mean a new area of risk for the region. And today I have to say that Mr Voronin, no matter how much we dislike him as a character and as a symbol, has at least not signed the Kozak Memorandum. I'm afraid Mr Dodon would not even question the need for this.

■ ***Hopefully, it's not like that. Thank you for the interview.***

Sorina Ștefârță

Editorial

Do we really want to give up on it?!

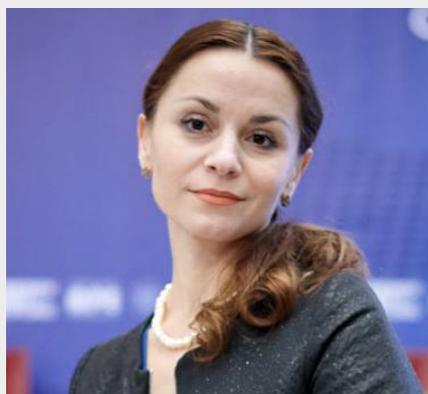
Victoria Bucătaru,
executive director,
Foreign Policy
Association



The uncertainty, together with the desire to prevent more obvious major democratic skirmishes, dominated the messages of the diplomats and experts - both national and international - who participated in the sixth European Integration Debate Forum held in Chisinau at the end of November. But before that, it was the citizens of the Republic of Moldova who, in the three *vox populi* that accompanied each of the three discussion panels, were asked about how they perceive the development of relations with the European Union. People have identified freedom of movement as an indisputable benefit but, at the same time, have highlighted the existing challenges, being firmly convinced that the phenomenon of corruption, the lack of an independent justice, and lack of a social and political cohesion are increasingly distancing both the country and its citizens from this democratic ideal.

“I am convinced this period will remain in the past,” told us the Deputy Prime Minister Iurie Leanca, who was among the few Moldovan high-officials present

Natalia Stercul,
programme
director, Foreign
Policy Association



at the event. He showed confidence in a prosperous future of the relations of our country with the EU, despite the deep internal and bilateral crises, and the indication as to the possible suspension of the visa liberalization regime and of the Association Agreement (the main document guiding Chisinau’s relations with the EU). This speaks either about the incoherence of the government or at least about the superficial understanding of the gravity of the situation, or about the fact that the authorities are trying, in a kind of tacit despair, to save the last bastion in the fight for euro-integration.

While four or five years ago Moldova was present on the Brussels agenda due to its successes and performance in the reform process, today, the EU Ambassador to Chisinau, Peter Michalko, speaks about the visibility of our country in an entirely different context and for absolutely other reasons ... The cancellation of the Chisinau mayoral elections’ results put in the dark not only the domestic political class but also the entire judicial system of the country.

In addition, this so-called “electoral exercise” raised several questions and anticipated possible challenges and potential fraud attempts in the parliamentary elections scheduled for next year. It is precisely this that explains the frequent statements made also by HE Peter Michalko, that the 2019 parliamentary elections are going to be a real test of democracy for our country. Is this a simple warning message? Or is this an attempt to explain to us once again that the commitments for the European integration cannot be proven by changes to the Constitution, but rather by refraining from distorting the democratic processes and by conducting free and fair elections? Either way, it is clear that the European partners have made it clear to us the key principle they are going to take into account in the coming months and have shown us the red line they are not going to accept to be crossed - all political forces should refrain from using administrative resources and focus on a democratic and open process, respecting the will of the people and the multiparty system in the Republic of Moldova.

Contrary to the declarations of the government representatives, the businessman Ion Sturza, president of the Foreign Policy Association, has dispersed the illusion of free and fair elections. According to him, the European partners and many Moldovans are wrong in their hope that the February 2019 parliamentary elections are going to be democratic and fair. Actually, Mr Sturza has voiced an idea that that is slowly but surely penetrating people’s minds: that the upcoming elections are already being rigged - through the changing of the electoral system and the attitude towards the Opposition; through corruption and party switching, and even through a possible invalidation of their results if someone in particular doesn’t like them ...

Returning to a normal dialogue with the European Union is, however, a priority for those

who understand the real challenges to the security and integrity of the Republic of Moldova. Let’s not forget that we are talking about “returning” - for as much as you would like it, it is not possible to delete everything and start from scratch.

In the process of re-establishing the relations with the EU and bringing the Moldovan-EU dialogue to normality, we should take into account not only what we could gain from now on, but also what seems already normal and we certainly wouldn’t like to lose. Because, after the enormous effort - both institutional and societal - to adjust to the EU normative and value framework, today we don’t even realize how integrated and even dependent on this space we are! Therefore...

Are we ready to give up on the free movement? What about the European financial and technical assistance, which is so necessary for reforms and modernization of the country? Could we say ‘no’ to the chance of quality education that our youth benefit from through *Erasmus*, *Horizon 2020* or *Marie Curie* programmes? Can we afford the luxury of rejecting opportunities for international cooperation at all levels and in all areas, including the social and health areas? Do we want to abandon the infrastructure interconnections, cross-border cooperation and exchange of experience that are all generating new realities? Or do we want to give up on the facilities and partnerships offered by the Free Trade Zone? Probably not. And then...

Maybe we should consider what we could lose and where we will get? And each of us should think of how much the Euro-Atlantic partners have invested in each of us - and what do we offer in return? Thus, we will re-evaluate the reality and look differently at the way to the future we want, but also at the future itself.

Security is very expensive and if you don't pay in time, you have to pay ten times higher costs

Serghei Popovici, Director of the Information Technology and Cyber Security Service

“Resilient institutions in the Republic of Moldova in the era of hybrid threats” - this was the title of the third panel of the European Integration Debate Forum organized recently by the Foreign Policy Association, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Moldova in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. Although the Forum was at its sixth edition, it was for the first time that the (geo) political issues have been transferred to the virtual area, where de facto the big battles for spheres of influence take place. Experts from Chisinau, Bucharest, Berlin and Washington - have tried to answer a number of key questions in this respect: Are Moldovan institutions resilient enough to deal with security threats? How does the new regional security architecture influence the internal security and the defense policies?; What are the main threats to the security and potential risk situations for the Republic of Moldova?; Is the country prepared to deal with hybrid threats and what are the steps needed to manage the emerging threats? How can the Republic of Moldova increase the level of human security of its citizens? And so on and so forth...

We have tried to address some of these aspects - in a more technical way - in the following dialogue with



Serghei Popovici, Director of the Information Technology and Cyber Security Service.

■ **Mr. Popovici, on November 22, 2018, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova approved by a majority vote the Information Security Strategy for the years 2019-2024 and the Action Plan for its implementation. Why was such a Strategy needed, given the National Programme for Cyber Security 2016-2020, but also the “Digital Moldova 2020”?**

■ **The above-mentioned Programme and the “Digital Moldova” are very good documents both at the level of responsible institutions and in terms of missions, but their weakness is the lack of financing mechanisms. Each institution had to allocate**

money from its own budget and, as we can never boast of generous funds, we had to rely mainly on the development partners' assistance, which is not enough. As a result, in these years, we have focused on training and awareness-raising activities on the need for security, and on strengthening the capacity of the institutions. The information security strategy for the years 2019-2024 comes up with a new approach and, in addition, with a dedicated budget. Because security is very expensive. Although it is not tangible, if you don't invest enough in it, at some point, you have to pay ten times higher costs.

The information security strategy for 2019-2024 comes up with a more realistic and more practical approach

■ **What is the novelty of this Strategy, symbolically structured in seven chapters?**

■ **First and foremost, this document integrates the priority areas with information security responsibilities and targets both public and private institutions, the audio-visual, civil society, and so on. It is a necessary thing, since, in terms of problems faced, the Republic of Moldova is close to the IT-developed countries:**

the number of cybercrime and cyber-attacks is increasing, and at the same time, there is a shortage of skilled human resources. The proposed actions will be designed to mitigate the negative impact of cyber-crimes, attacks and incidents. In addition, it addresses a number of other major issues - the lack of an integrated cyber security management system (CERT) that identifies vulnerabilities and risks. So, we are talking about a more realistic and more practical approach.

■ **How does the new Strategy fit your Service?**

■ We're glad we're no longer alone. Although, formally, we are under the authority of the Government, in the absence of another body with similar competencies, we did let's say "everything was needed" - from assistance provided to public institutions to online literacy, including for children. I would like to mention, in the given context, that special attention in the Strategy is paid to the security component of the media. Thus, solutions are proposed to counteract the disinformation and manipulative information phenomenon, which directly threatens the security of the country's information space. And one of the central elements of the Strategy is the creation of the Coordinating Council for Informational Security - a collective body with consultative and operational attributions, which will ensure the systemic integration of the information space components.

The paradigm of security perception changes slowly...

■ **To what extent have we managed, from your point of view, to pass in our mentality as a society from the security equivalent to soldiers, munitions and iron locks to its virtual concept, which is gaining today ever more ground?**

■ I would say that the paradigm of perception is changing- albeit not very quickly- and that's because in the last two years there have been quite a few victims of malicious cyber-programmes, both in the public and private sectors. Unfortunately, however, we often react only after it happens and only then we become aware of the importance of security and take action at the institutional level. Entry guards and locks are not a bad thing, by the way, but these "classic systems" have to be adjusted to the new realities, as technologies are evolving rapidly. Thus, the most sophisticated security solutions can be annihilated by an already simple mobile phone, with which you photograph the necessary information and send it over a 3G network ... And here we get into another sensitive problem, which appears as a real dilemma, especially for democratic societies: private vs. security.

■ **What is this dilemma about?**

■ On the one hand, companies want and need to secure their information, including forbidding employees to use mobile phones,

for example. On the other hand, the employee wants and has the right to use this phone. It will not be easy to find the balance, and it is yet to be seen how the EU policies that have entered into force this year are going to work in practice. The fact is that you cannot secure 100% everything. Therefore, each institution needs to do its own risk analysis and decide what tools it needs in order to ensure the most effective security. How many institutions in the Republic of Moldova do such an analysis, assessing how much a possible cyber-attack would cost them at the level of image, money, or customers, if the information they own was compromised? I don't know, but I don't think there are many such institutions. It is somehow understandable: for now, the Republic of Moldova has not lost so much from such attacks for the simple reason it doesn't have yet so many data exposed online. But things are changing. Therefore, it is important that the minimum-security requirements be not just a "good" document which rests on the shelf and is taken from there only when an audit comes in.

■ **To paraphrase the title of a theatre show ... what do we do with the civil servant who is still operating with "mail.ru"?**

■ And together with that, the unlicensed operation or antivirus systems, which put you at risk from the start... We have to understand that what we get for free today will cost us very much tomorrow. Unfortunately, there is a vicious

circle in the centre of which there is a chronic shortage of funds that we hope it is going to diminish at least together with the approval of the Information Security Strategy. At the same time, the public officials should know that security is also their responsibility, as it is the responsibility of the citizens, the public or private institutions. You don't solve anything if you have a very good IT specialist in the ministry or you buy up-to-date software, but continue to copy unlicensed apps and open suspicious emails.

■ **What about you? How do you monitor and exclude these phenomena within your Service?**

■ The online hygiene is one of the basic conditions for security, which is why we are encouraging the institutions, demanding from them to report cyber incidents. Not because we are interested in what the issues are – there exists still the perception that communicating is to assume an image risk - but only this way we can help, while institutions such as the Ministry of Interior or the Prosecutor's Office can come up with prevention measures. That is why we welcomed the creation, based on the Strategy, of this Coordinating Council for Information Security, which will receive the alerts and come up with solutions for help. We will try also together to focus on prevention, especially since the trends are evolving rapidly. A lot of data has moved to mobile phones - and how many of us have antivirus on our smartphones? Or on the TVs, or on ... refrigerators, because they also

have IP identity recently? Security means much more than we think at the moment.

It is better to be prepared and flexible than naive and vulnerable

■ ***We will soon enter the electoral campaign and this time we are probably going to discuss more about cyber security, informational security and, why not, the voting security. Especially that there have been problems in even bigger houses in the last elections, in the form of algorithms designed to really change the way people think and influence their political option. How are you going to ensure the cybernetic and informational security of the campaign?***

■ Indeed, the cyber security is no longer a technical problem, it is a geopolitical one. But the human factor is essential also here. You can have the most advanced security solutions at hand, but if Hillary Clinton used personal email to transmit information ... it compromised the entire campaign. But in a strictly electoral context, the Central Electoral Commission has the most important mission - and we are going to provide it with support if needed.

■ ***There are still voices calling on us to give up technology and return to traditional methods of operating with information. Do you think it is possible?***

■ I've also heard such calls when the

Google scandal began, and even this year with "Cambridge Analytical" ... But this is an illusion - not even the Republic of Moldova, which is very small and whose impact on the global economy is insignificant, can give up on the internet, electronic payments, cards. Therefore, it is better to be flexible - from people to governments - more operative and more effective in collaboration. We should adapt legislation and policies, involve business in public-private partnerships. Let's collaborate and find solutions for "rehabilitation" of social networks, for it is there that the biggest disinformation and manipulation take place. Revolutions and wars moved to the Internet and we cannot ignore it. And, rather than being naive, it is better to be prepared.

That is why this year we have organized two simulations for national decision-makers in order to identify the possible gaps and decide how to react to crises. And it is vital that the need for security is understood at the level of political decision-makers ... In this context, Andrian Candu's initiative to create a Strategic Coordination Centre for Combating Hybrid Threats for Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia is extremely beneficial. Let's get together, talk, and make simulations. We should know how to act in case of crises and whom to consult. De facto, it is an initiative that helps us not to be alone.

■ ***Thank you for the interview.***

Sorina Ștefăruță

Looking from the outside

European Union confirms reduction of financial support due to deterioration of rule of law and democracy in the Republic of Moldova

In one way or another, the relations with the European Union occupy a constant place both on the working agenda of the authorities and of the political parties of the Republic of Moldova, including in the context of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. From the pragmatic and even reluctant, sometimes “balance in the relations with the East and the West”, promoted by President Igor Dodon, also the informal leader of the Moldovan socialists, to somewhat more enthusiastic “integration into the EU through the Unification with Romania”, taken over by the increasingly numerous “unionist” parties that have appeared lately—they are all looking for the electoral target in order to win the case on 24 February 2019 and ... a mandate in the future Legislative. At the same time, in the same perspective of elections, Brussels probably wants to reiterate its positions of principle and its expectations from the Republic of Moldova in a pre- and post-electoral context, precisely because the bilateral agenda also exists “after” election. These messages were voiced on November 27th by Christian Danielsson, Director-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Thomas Mayr Harting, Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia in the European External Action Service.

According to the official press release, Christian Danielsson and Thomas Harting were in Chisinau to reaffirm



Thomas Mayr Harting, Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia in the European External Action Service, Christian Danielsson, Director-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and HE Peter Michalko, head of the EU Delegation to Chisinau

the European Union’s commitment to bring tangible benefits to Moldovan citizens. The same press release mentions that the visit comes against the background of the continuous deterioration of the rule of law and democracy in our country. The issue was also addressed during the meetings of the two officials with President Igor Dodon, Prime Minister Pavel Filip, Speaker Andrian Candu, as well as with the representatives of the Opposition and civil society. In addition, Christian Danielsson gave a speech at the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, reminding the young academics of the European Union’s commitments to invest in the skills of young people.

The EU, waiting for concrete progress

Thus, the European Union expects the Moldovan authorities to take urgent

and immediate action to rectify the situation, and in particular to:

- Ensure the upcoming parliamentary elections are conducted in a credible, inclusive and transparent manner. This includes ensuring appropriate international monitoring and ensuring a level playing field for the Opposition, including in terms of registration and in the media;
- Expedite a thorough, impartial and comprehensive prosecution of the banking fraud, exposed in 2014; recover the misappropriated funds and bring all those responsible to justice, irrespective of any political affiliations and without further delay;
- Engage on substantive judicial reform, with a view to guaranteeing quality, transparency, impartiality and independence of the judiciary.
- Fight against high-level corruption

including by ensuring the effective implementation of the asset declaration system with regard to all high-level actors.

In light of this deterioration, and in line with the principle of strict conditionality, the European Commission has taken the decision to substantially recalibrate its financial assistance and redirect support to projects that have a direct, positive impact on Moldovan citizens. Payments under the Macro-Financial Assistance and EU budget support programmes have also been put on hold, pending tangible progress in the aforementioned areas. The EU will continue to follow with the closest attention all aspects relevant to the preparation and conduct of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova.

Impact of EU support to Moldovan citizens

In the past years, the EU has been supporting many reforms at national level and provided substantial amounts of financial assistance to Moldova, which has brought the following results to Moldovan people:

- Financial support for **5,000 enterprises**, supported **56,000 jobs in SMEs**, and created 1,735 new jobs.
- Nearly **150 nurseries**, schools and community centres around the country have benefited from an EU

programme providing them with efficient energy supply.

- New drinking water supply infrastructure has been built with EU support all over the country. Now, more than **15,000 people** are provided with safe and sufficient drinking water.
- The EU is also contributing to building roads all around the country, including the EU-funded **Ungheni bypass**.
- In the years 2015-2017, more than 900 Moldovan students and academic staff have been able to study and teach in the EU thanks to the EU's Erasmus+ programme.

In the future, just actions that bring direct benefits to people

In the next period, EU assistance will focus only on actions that bring direct benefits to citizens and support agents of change including civil society, independent media, reform-minded local authorities and SMEs. Under the 2017 and 2018 budgets, the EU has recalibrated its financial support, now worth over €106 million, with the following programmes to be implemented within the coming years:

- Socio-economic development of the focal regions - Ungheni and Cahul. The support programme, worth €23 million, will contribute to the creation of jobs and value

chains, provide support to local SMEs, local actors and civil society and fund the development of small-scale infrastructures. This will help **boost local social-economic development** and reduce the gap between Chisinau and the regions of the Republic of Moldova.

- The EU will also continue supporting the **peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict**. Over €10 million of EU funds will help to increase confidence between Chisinau and Tiraspol through joint initiatives involving local authorities, civil society organisations and other stakeholder from both sides of the river.
- The EU will also invest €40 million in infrastructure, with the **electricity interconnector between Romania and Moldova**, connecting further EU and Moldova and leading to more stable and cheaper electricity for citizens.
- The EU will also further promote the international exchange of students through the **Erasmus+** programme and fund more mobility opportunities for Moldovan researchers, with the aim to further scientific excellence in Moldova and increase their competitiveness in EU programmes such as **Horizon 2020**.

For more information on the impact of EU-funded projects in Moldova, visit:
<http://www.eu4moldova.md/>.

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