

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

MONTHLY BULLETIN • JANUARY 2019 • NR.1 (155)

Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. **HE Daniel Ioniță, Romanian Ambassador to Chisinau: "I wish the principles and values governing the common policies of the European Union irradiate positively also in the Republic of Moldova"**
2. **Editorial by HE Luminița Odobescu, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Romania to the European Union: "The priorities of the Romanian Presidency are closely correlated with the expectations of European citizens"**
3. **Radu Magdin, political analyst: "Romania's mission in these six months is to be the link between the East and the West"**
4. **Expert opinion. Dionis Cenușă: „The expectations of the Moldovan authorities from the Romanian EU Presidency are far too high"**

News in Brief



Although the Moldovan society has not reached yet a full consensus on the state foreign policy, there is still a considerable majority that clearly stands for the European integration. And the implementation of the Association Agreement has always been among the Government priorities. The statements belong to Prime Minister Pavel Filip and were made on the occasion of Diplomacy Day, celebrated on January 17th. The head of the Executive appreciated in particular the contribution of the diplomatic corps to the Transnistrian settlement process, including the adoption by the UN General Assembly last year of the Resolution "On the complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military units from the territory of the Republic of Moldova". The prime minister said there is still much to be done to promote our country on the international arena. "I believe, however, that the benefits of the European course will gradually strengthen our society and bring consensus. I want to assure you that the Republic of Moldova will remain firmly anchored in the European development model and that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration will continue to play a central role in coordinating this course", said the prime minister.



The electoral process in the Republic of Moldova was the key topic of the meeting between Prime Minister Pavel Filip and the American Ambassador to Chisinau Derek J. Hogan that took place at the end of January. The officials exchanged views on the electoral campaign, which has just begun, and discussed the dynamics of the Moldovan-American dialogue, including the stimulation of cooperation in the fields of information technology and cyber security. The Prime Minister reconfirmed the government's determination to ensure a fair, transparent, free electoral process in accordance with all international norms. To this end, he stressed that several foreign observers were invited to monitor the elections and cameras were installed in the polling stations. At the same time, the Premier requested an objective attitude from observers and partners.



According to a joint statement signed by the Speakers of Parliament in Chisinau, Tbilisi and Kiev, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine will co-operate in combating threats in the three countries. Thus, the three legislative fora have undertaken to identify solutions for the creation of anti-hybrid cells and for designating National Contact Points that will receive, analyze and share specific information on the hybrid threat indicators and warnings. The document emphasizes that the hybrid threats seek to exploit the vulnerabilities of a country and often attempt to undermine the fundamental values and freedoms of democracy, but also threaten the energy, financial, transport, defense, public health or food security systems. The signatories expressed their willingness to join the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE) and other relevant European structures as participants or observers. They also encourage mutual assistance between countries, but also support from the EU and the USA, in order to build the capacity of the institutions in the three states and increase their resilience to respond to common threats and strengthen security in the region.

Romania at the helm of the EU: for the cohesion of Europe



Chisinau, January 30th, 2019. The Ambassador Daniel Ioniță presents the Priorities of the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council

Sorina Ștefârță

Cohesion, this is the leitmotiv of the first Romanian mandate to the European Union Presidency. An ambitious mandate, which is gaining more and more speed in order to achieve in

the best possible way the priorities structured around four pillars of action: Europe of convergence: growth, cohesion, competitiveness, connectivity; A Safer Europe; Europe as a global actor; Europe of common values.

An audacious mission at a time when the European Union will have to manage at least two major challenges - the Brexit, the first withdrawal exercise from the EU by a member state, and the European Parliament

► elections, for which, no doubt, the convinced Europhiles and the Eurosceptics from all over the world will have the same zeal.

“The vision Romania is going to project during its mandate to the EU Presidency will be built around the principle of cohesion - a concept that covers many of the realities that need to be accommodated in the current European context. This goal is also reflected in the motto of Romania’s EU Presidency - Cohesion, a common European value. Romania has the chance to demonstrate its strong support to the European project of integration and cohesion. We will act as an honest broker to identify solutions and enable the European agenda to be advanced on all the dossiers currently under discussion at the EU level”. These are just some statements made by HE Daniel Ioniță, Romanian Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova, during the public presentation of the priorities of the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council, organized on January 30th by the Embassy team jointly with the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE).

How is this EU Presidency which is so close to us - both geographically and spiritually - going to “influence” the realities in the Republic of Moldova? It is the question we wanted to find out answers to in the first 2019 edition of the Foreign Policy Newsletter. Enjoy the newsletter!

I wish the principles and values governing the common policies of the European Union irradiate positively also in the Republic of Moldova

HE Daniel Ioniță, Romanian Ambassador to Chisinau



“These are the pillars that represent the essence of Romania’s vision of the way in which we believe we should advance our common agenda and respond to the highly responsible mission that has been entrusted to us”, says His Excellency Daniel Ioniță, Romanian Ambassador to Chisinau. About how these priorities are going to be implemented de facto and what their echo will be in the Republic of Moldova, where hundreds of thousands of Romanian citizens live, find out in the following interview.

We are both a European state and an important regional actor

Since 1 January 2019, the European Union has come closer than ever to the Republic of Moldova. It’s more of a metaphorical approach, of course, as the frontiers remain, and the EU came closer only as a result of Romania’s takeover of the six-month presidency of the EU Council. A mandate that, among its key priorities, addresses issues such as the UK withdrawal from the EU; the Sibiu Summit - the first European summit in history to be held on Europe Day, on May 9th; the European Parliament elections to be held on May 23rd-26th. These are priorities stemming from the four pillars on which Bucharest has built its first EU Presidency: “Europe of convergence”, “A safer Europe”, “Europe as a stronger global actor” and “Europe of common values”.

■ *Your Excellency, first of all, congratulations on the occasion of Romania’s takeover of the rotating Presidency of the European Union for the first time in 12 years since joining the EU. For the political class, it certainly means hard work at the EU level and an attempt at achieving cohesion at home. What is in your opinion the significance of this event for ordinary Romanian citizens?*

■ *Thank you and I am glad to hear you have confidence in us that we can cope with this great responsibility that Romania has assumed with its entire determination and energy. It is a huge opportunity for all Romanian citizens*

to feel like European citizens, citizens of a strong Europe. This moment is a reconfirmation that the work done during the pre-accession period and over the 12-year period since Romania's accession to the EU has yielded results, and we can state firmly that the Romanians are among the strongest supporters of the European project

■ **How has Romania developed over these 12 years - economically, socially, and politically? Has Bucharest managed to establish itself as a regional leader at least? For us, those from the left side of the Prut, Romania remains a model, because paraphrasing an old ballad, it has better roads, a prosperous economy, and a fairer justice. But is Romania the state the Romanian citizens imagined 12 years ago?**

■ Even though Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007 was a recognition of pre-accession efforts, the process of European integration is much more complex and lasting. All socio-economic indicators prove the viability of this country project and fully reconfirm the joint efforts of the entire Romanian society. Nobody contests the fact that Romania is a European state. Moreover, through its projects, experiences and interactions, Romania is also becoming an important, listened to and respected actor in its region of geographic affiliation. Every Romanian citizen imagines the country in his or her own way and I think we can find 20 million possible answers here, but I am convinced that every response shares the desire for prosperity, security and stability.

■ **Is Romania still on the top of the pro-EU countries, in a Union where more often than not, voices are disputing the necessity of the EU project? What can help us - beyond the Prut and here too - not to fall/ fail in anti-Europeanism?**

■ Definitely, yes. However, we should continue to tirelessly promote the values and principles on which the European construction is based, to become aware of and internalize the motto of the European Union, "Unity in Diversity", as well as to combat other artificial values such as populism, chauvinism, extremism and illiberalism. This motto is the true expression of the dynamism of the European project, its perennialism and its ability to adapt to realities without abandoning the founding principles and values.

All priorities refer to a certain extent to the Republic of Moldova

■ **The four thematic pillars on which the working agenda of the first EU Presidency is built are: Europe of Convergence, A Safer Europe, Europe as a stronger global actor and Europe of Common Values. Is there a place for the Republic of Moldova in one of these fundamental pillars?**

■ Romania's takeover of the presidency of the EU Council is a significant moment, which we want to capitalize on by setting out consistent priorities to the benefit of the citizens as primary recipients of the European project, as well as extensively, in order to strengthen the role of the Union at the global level. As far as the Republic of Moldova is concerned, I think that, above all, the mandate of the Romanian Presidency of the EU will be an incentive for it to continue with its European course. As far as the priorities are concerned, they are being pursued transversally, which means that all of them, to a certain extent, also target the Republic of Moldova. Whether we are talking about combating terrorism, promoting the digital agenda, competitiveness or energy

connectivity, the EU space is an open space that operates together with its neighbourhood, including the Republic of Moldova. And I wish that the good practices, lessons learned, the principles and values that govern our common policies, including the internal market and the four fundamental freedoms of the EU, also positively irradiate in the Republic of Moldova.

■ **How could, however, Chisinau benefit from these "six Romanian months" in Brussels? The foreign minister, Tudor Ulianovschi, said in an interview that, for the Romanian Presidency of the EU, he will most likely be interested in organizing some thematic sectoral meetings, in stimulating the Moldovan-Romanian Commission on European Integration, in a joint action plan and even in an attempt to get a clear message on Moldova's accession prospect. How many of these have taken/are taking shape?**

■ For the Republic of Moldova, the instrument through which the rule of law can be strengthened and economic growth can become sustainable, given the opportunities the state has, is the Eastern Partnership (EaP). And precisely within this platform, for the six months of the EU Presidency, Romania has proposed an ambitious schedule of meetings to advance the achievement of concrete sectoral targets in order to bring the Eastern Partnership member countries closer to the European Union, in areas such as:

- Digital (organization of an EaP Ministerial Meeting on Digital Economy on 28 February 2019) - the main topic will be the harmonization of roaming fees;
- Energy (organization of an EaP Ministerial Meeting on Energy issues on 2 April 2019) - the main topic will be energy interconnection;

- Business Environment (organization of an EaP2 Business Forum on 11 June 2019);
- Transport (organization of an EaP Ministerial Meeting on Transport issues on 6 June 2019).

All these events will benefit from the presence of the ministers from the EU and the six EaP states, including the Republic of Moldova, as well as from the participation of the European Commissioners responsible for the above-mentioned sectors. In addition to these sectoral meetings, in May, Romania will hold a high-level conference on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the EaP. There will be a debate that will help strengthen the dialogue between the EU and its Eastern partners, but also promote the post 2020 vision. This event will be dedicated, in particular, to the main achievements of the EaP during its ten years of existence.

Evidently, the development of the relationship between Chisinau and Brussels depends, to a large extent, on the Moldovan citizens' choices, as well as on the decision of the authorities regarding the implementation of the reform agenda deriving from the Association Agreement and the implementation of the Free Trade Area Agreement. So, from the point of view of Romania, the bilateral agenda is more than consistent and we are confident it will materialize provided the Republic of Moldova will maintain the same pace and determination of the European course.

Bucharest's strategic objective is to support the European course of Chisinau

■ **What is Romania for the Republic of Moldova today? For the perceptions are still quite diverse - from the mother country, the ally and the strategic**

advocate, to the potential aggressor which will occupy us again, repairing the kindergartens... In the same way, we can hear over the Prut that the Republic Moldova is a shredder of Romanian money, but also - periodically - a voting pool. Where is the truth?

■ Romania has never made a secret of its foreign policy agenda regarding Moldova: the strategic objective of Bucharest is to support the European course of the Republic of Moldova in line with the bilateral strategic partnership for the European integration of the country. The special character of the bilateral relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, determined by the community of language, history, culture and traditions, provides the best basis for the development of cooperation between the two states on all levels. These two prerequisites serve as basis for all the projects Romania is carrying out in the Republic of Moldova, projects that have direct impact on the citizens, working to their benefit, regardless of their ethnicity and religion, the language they speak or the geographical region they live in. In addition to Romania's qualifications mentioned by you, I would add the one of the main trading partners of the Republic of Moldova with a trade volume of nearly two billion dollars. And a decisive contribution to this, together with the geographical location and the common history, was brought about by the signing and implementation by the Republic of Moldova of the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Area.

■ **What are the Bucharest expectations from the elections of 24 February 2019, in the situation when the last Resolution of the European Parliament has great expectations, in particular, regarding the correctness and manner in which these elections will take place?**

■ The year 2019 is important for the Republic of Moldova. The stake may be the country's democratic destiny, and the February 2019 election exercise will be a major test in this respect. That is why I will reiterate the message conveyed recently by Romania's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Teodor Meleșcanu, regarding the observance of the highest standards in the preparation and running of parliamentary elections.

■ **How do you think the situation in the European Union as a whole impact the level of Moldovan citizens' attachment to the European project? How can we deal - and how can Europe deal - with the anti-EU propaganda campaign proliferated for years, not just in the Republic of Moldova? Or we can already consider it a lost battle?**

■ The Republic of Moldova has been a laboratory of propaganda, fake news, and hybrid warfare, which often provides "products" that fuel the anti-European messages. Often, these messages use the so-called "disastrous situation" in the European Union to justify either the lack of appetite for internal reforms, the lack of concrete results or the lack of a viable alternative to the European project. The Republic of Moldova can defend itself from this tirade, demonstrating by deeds that it can become again an EaP champion that not only benefits from the opportunities offered by the EU through the liberalized visa regime, the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Area, but also establishes itself as a true promoter of the European orientation by respecting the European norms and values.

■ **Thank you for the interview and we wish you a successful Presidency!**

Sorina Ștefăruță

Editorial

The priorities of the Romanian Presidency are closely correlated with the expectations of European citizens

HE Luminița Odobescu, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Romania to the European Union

The text below is signed by HE Ambassador Luminița Odobescu, Permanent Representative of Romania to the European Union, and was published on her Facebook account at the end of last year. We decided to take it over in this edition of the Newsletter as an editorial, considering it to be the element which complements in a perfect way the atmosphere of the current rotating EU presidency - from projects and priorities to the expectations and hopes of Bucharest in its first and full of challenges mandate at the head of the European Union.

„Within a few days, Romania is taking over the Presidency of the European Union Council. We have been preparing for this for a long time, making unprecedented efforts, both politically and technically, administratively and logistically. These preparations have been carried out in close cooperation with the Member States and the European institutions, largely following specific procedures that the previous presidencies have pursued and which are part of a guidance that all Member States enjoy, regardless of whether they have held or not before this mandate.

At the beginning of December, the Romanian Prime Minister and the entire Government held meetings



with the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and members of the College of Commissioners in Brussels. On this occasion, the main dossiers and major political stakes were discussed in detail. At the same time, each minister deepened the specific issues in separate discussions not only with the European Commissioners, but also with the Commission Chairpersons and the rapporteurs on the main dossiers in the European Parliament. In parallel, there have been held intense political discussions with all the Member States, including in the margins of the European Council, to get an understanding of the position

on the major dossiers. Additionally, we coordinated intensively at the ministerial and diplomatic level with the Austrian Presidency and participated in the last two months in all the co-ordination meetings and trialogues of the Austrian colleagues...

These aspects are important to highlight not only the fact that, from the position of an impartial mediator, Romania needs to know all the stakes and the sensitivities of the parties to the negotiations, but also to show that, together with Austria, we have run, we believe, with good results, an exercise that will allow us to ensure a proper transition in the takeover of the dossiers aiming at leading them to completion as soon as possible. At the level of the Permanent Representation, the team is complete and we have



made the last checks with the Member States and the European institutions on the state of the dossiers that we are going to take over from January 1st. This exercise is done in close coordination with the capital, which has the overall view of the whole process. The timetable for the formal and informal Councils has also been finalized, having it forwarded to the Member States and the European institutions and also made available to the public concerned. In addition, the draft Agendas for the Ministerial Meetings in the first semester of 2019 have already been distributed to the Member States, according to practice. For the next period, meetings and dialogues with the European Parliament (and the Commission) have been planned in detail.

Returning to the significance of the 1st of January 2019, it is important to recall that it marks the entry into a new stage of the status of Romania as a European Union member state. This is the first time we'll be holding this mandate, we are well prepared and we want to demonstrate that all the ingredients of success are ensured: mobilization, commitment, clear determination to assume an impartial mediator role in advancing the results, the desire to contribute to the consolidation of the European project, which the Romanians are supporting through incontestable and deeply sincere pro-European feelings.

We are both ambitious and realistic at the same time, given the context of our Presidency, which is by no means an ordinary situation. First of all, we are talking about the limited legislative window that we have at our disposal for the negotiations with the European Parliament which is suspending its work in April, before the European elections. This perspective obliges us to be pragmatic, tactical and to prioritize, taking into account the expectations of the European citizens. The European citizens are the legitimate beneficiaries of our efforts, but also the most important judges of the concrete results that we are going to achieve at the end of this mandate.

Another particular feature of this context is the Brexit process, which is a general challenge for all Member States and European institutions. Of course,

we want the British withdrawal to be accompanied by an agreement, but this depends on the voting in the British Parliament from early next year. Holding the Presidency of the EU Council, Romania needs to be prepared for possible scenarios, and an immediate goal is to discuss and adopt the 14 contingency measures proposed by the European Commission this month, applicable in the case of absence of an agreement. The future budget of the Union (Multiannual Financial Framework) is another major dossier, which we want to advance as much as possible. Priority will be given to discussing the architecture of the future multi-annual budget and the over 35 sectoral legislative proposals. On some of the legislative proposals, where progress is already being made, we will try to secure this progress together with the European Parliament. The December European Council has set the Romanian Presidency the task of moving ahead with the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework with the goal of concluding the negotiations in autumn 2019.

Sibiu is a key moment where the future strategic agenda of the EU leaders will be defined. This has to respond to the current economic, social, security and climate challenges.

The priorities of the Romanian Presidency, grouped on the four pillars - Europe of Convergence, A Safer Europe, Europe as a Global Actor and Europe of Values - are articulated and closely linked to the European agenda and the expectations of the European citizens. These priorities reflect the assumption of a factual situation and of the challenges we have to face together.

Like any presidency, we are trying to prepare for unexpected situations, and communication here is extremely important. We remain cautious and vigilant about the risks of disinformation, accentuated in the (pre) electoral context. Romania is deeply connected to the European decision-making process and we are convinced we will demonstrate this. We are awaiting with responsibility, realism and confidence the beginning of this presidency which we want to be in everybody's interests and beneficial to all".

Romania's mission in these six months is to be the link between the East and the West

Radu Magdin, political analyst

He is a reference name in the area of political analysis in Romania, and his expertise and that of the consulting company he is managing is taken into account not only in Bucharest but also in many other capitals, far beyond the European area. Through the analytical product he is providing together with his team, he tries to present a realistic picture of the region, but also to anticipate how the echo of the "internal" e/involutions in one part of the world can influence things seemingly difficult to influence in a totally different part of the world... Because, says Radu Magdin, director of "Smartlink Communications", it's an illusion to imagine today that you can act and excel without taking into account the speed, the complexity and rigidity of global phenomena. About these phenomena at the beginning of 2019 and about the role of Romania and of the Republic of Moldova in this context we have discussed in the following interview. And as the discussion took place only a few hours/minutes after the British Parliament had rejected the Brexit Agreement negotiated with the EU by Prime Minister Theresa May, we have naturally started with (still) this part of the European Union....

You're either in the club or you lose the benefits

■ **Mr. Magdin, what's happening - or not - with Brexit?**

■ The events in the British Parliament were predictable. Prime Minister Theresa May faces an impossible situation; in fact, she is called to honour an electoral promise based on a lie. The key promise was, in a simplified way, that the UK would be able to take back control,



preserving the benefits it enjoyed. This cannot be: you are either in the club and have some obligations, and less control respectively, or you have the desired control, but you lose the benefits - in the given case, you have no longer access to the EU internal market. The deal negotiated by Theresa May and her team with the EU was the maximum they could get by trying to have it both ways. In the end, however, no one was satisfied, so they voted against - both those who supported Brexit and those who were for Remain. And it is not Theresa May that should be blamed for the current state of affairs, but David Cameron and a number of populists who have come up with such messages that were quite effective at the time. And they have arrived where they have arrived.

■ **What could and should follow?**

■ I think there are two possible options. Either they go for a second referendum and act according to its outcome - which might be for remaining in the EU this time - or there will happen a so-called "disordered withdrawal", which is going to create legislative uncertainty and other

consequences. I'm inclined to believe that the pressure for a second referendum will greatly increase and that they will try to postpone the March 29th, announced as the ultimate date for the rupture from the EU. One thing is certain - a referendum with a different result than from 2014 would affect many calculations, both in the UK and beyond, of those who have already rethought the EU without London.

The perception is and will continue to be that of a global chaos

■ **By the way, the Poles and the Italians have announced recently that it is possible to have a "European Spring" this year in the European Union, and the hint was not at all about the season that is going to come... Where does the EU go today?**

■ Things are getting complicated in Europe and in its neighbourhood and one of the reasons for these complications is that everyone is watching the news, which each of us understands according to his/her expectations, beliefs, education, fears... From my point of view, the fundamental issue is that we have problems in the USA, which today, through President Donald Trump, is sending out globally, from the world's most powerful country, a clear signal that a number of things are being played, while certain principles are questionable or disputable... And after each moment of instability, favoured by the US President himself, a number of states will allow themselves to do everything they want, believing that Washington is busy with something else ... It is partially true, Washington is focused on "home" and we are all witnessing a withdrawal - at least a



declarative one, if not real - of Americans in several global files. Consequently, we remain with the feeling of a dogless village. I don't think it is that way, but the perception is that of a chaos and this perception is going to accentuate-accelerate in 2019, because we are not going to see fundamentally different messages from Washington.

■ **Why would this matter to us?**

■ Because we are going to witness bilateral power negotiations either between the USA and China - especially on trade and other rivalries - or between the USA and the EU. In the given situation, it is obvious that the already existent divisions are going to be fuelled - between East and West of Europe, between North and South... We are witnessing a very variable geometry at this time, and in third states the people are not stupid. The leaders here are also watching the TV and are making decisions according to this perceived chaos in the EU or globally. The European elections are going to take place in May- it's a period when the European Commission, which is in its last few months of the mandate, is not in a position to do much and the Parliament is also preparing to leave. De facto, the main driver is going to be the European Union Council, whose Presidency in the first six months of 2019 will be ensured by Romania. Although you cannot put on Romania's shoulders everything that is going to happen in the EU in these six months - it is not the fault of President Iohannis if Theresa's May Government falls. Just as you cannot put Romania's domestic problems on the shoulders of the European Union.

■ **If we admit that the USA is withdrawing increasingly from global affairs, who could be the new "coordinator", if is to use a popular word in Chisinau?**

■ I don't think China will assume this coordinating role. Each will rather try to consolidate itself internally and secure its influence in its own region. EU - in the

Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership countries and North Africa; China - will try to impose itself even more on the South China Sea and neighbouring countries. In addition, China has this concrete geopolitical project "One Belt, One Road" designed to provide a direct link between Asia and Europe; while the United States will, on the one hand, try to solve a series of internal problems and, on the other hand, will try to manage its rivalry with China, perceived as such also at the global level, and to prevent a junction between Beijing and Moscow against Washington. In this situation, for me - as an Eastern European that has an affinity for both the USA and Europe - the only problem is that no progress can be made, including in Washington, without coordination and co-operation with European partners. Obviously, there may be divergent interests, but I think that the current blunt relationship between the USA and Germany which is felt strongly, is wrong, for example.

Chisinau has and has no luck with Romania being at the helm of the EU

■ **How confident are you about the success of the Romanian Presidency of the EU? And how achievable are the priorities announced for this first European mandate?**

■ I think that, above all, the strategic mission of Bucharest lies in trying to achieve cohesion as a European value. It is also a matter of spirit: and namely, will we succeed, with diplomatic efforts, to calm down things a little bit and give the European citizens the feeling that the European Union speaks with one voice?! Today, many European capitals are aware of the importance of unity and that alternatives don't exist. Yes, it is true that some capitals are trying to transmit to the "traditional" chancelleries, such as Berlin and Paris, the signal that they want a sort of European renegotiation that will make their voice stronger. Hence, the emergence of a new strategic alliance, Budapest-Warsaw, to which Rome also

added. But this is a circumstantial triangle because Rome's history has always been coupled with Paris and Berlin... Yes, for now, the Italian Government needs more flexibility to deliver its promises, which are partially populist, made in the 2018 elections. But alliances do change.

■ **And in this Europe which - even indirectly confirmed by you - is more divisive than ever, is it not a utopia to propose cohesion as an objective?**

■ More than being divided, I would say that Europe is marked by multiple dilemmas. The economic crisis has produced multiple cracks on the European social, economic, political fibre, generating distrust and causing the populism to get (re)born. So today the crisis has to do with credibility and perception ... For when, in some states, the populist advance accounts for 20%, it is obvious that things are not right at all in these societies. And we are not just talking about foreign influence, although it is known that the far-right parties in Europe are directly or indirectly funded by the Russians. But it is clear that there is also an accumulation of frustration in society that materializes in this vote of populist and extremist parties. What is more, in the given context, our interest is to maintain the cohesion of the European group. And Romania's mission in the next six months is to be the necessary liaison between the East and the West. At least ideologically and strategically. Personally, I believe and I hope we will succeed. And I am convinced the Sibiu Summit will be a success.

■ **The Republic of Moldova has waited for the Romanian Presidency of the EU, including in order to boost its own European integration. Is Chisinau able to take advantage of this rather small, timewise, window of opportunity?**

■ Chisinau has and has no luck with Romania being at the helm of the EU. It has luck because, in the person of Bucharest, it has an open ally from all points of view of the Moldovan interests,

an ally that will strongly support a pro-European post-electoral alliance after the February 24th elections. And it has no luck because the European trend itself is not very benevolent towards the Eastern Partnership countries and Bucharest's position and desire to change the atmosphere in the EU is not enough. By the way, the fact that an Eastern Partnership Summit is not organized on the occasion of this project's tenth anniversary is an important political signal in this respect ... Moreover, the *enlargement fatigue*, which occurred in 2000, has accelerated, and no matter how tantalizing Russian propaganda is in presenting the EU as an imperialist power, the facts show that there is a strong reluctance in the European capitals towards any kind of expansion. A Euro-integration promise was made to the Western Balkans, with a perspective for 2025, but there are a lot of things that should happen both there and in the European capitals for this process to complete. The good thing when it comes to the Western Balkans is the existence of the accession perspective, which gives you an anchoring in time - 2025 that can be 2027, and even 2030, depending on the reforms - and the feeling of an open door. The Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia are caught in a loop and it is not clear where they are going to. And the EU is rather looking at them as to a good neighbour whom, although you are willing to put more money into, you don't see it as a future member.

■ ***Though conditionality is not recommended, could this have been different?***

■ I think Bucharest has been trying to influence things over time, but we haven't probably been strong enough as a country at important moments in time. Romania has tried to promote the idea that the Republic of Moldova is a small enough country and quite close to the EU borders to be able to go almost unnoticed into the EU club, along with the Western Balkans. However, this operation failed. And when the Eastern

Partnership emerged, things could not be mixed up any longer. We are all prisoners of geography. But there is also the other truth: if we do our homework well - not in a strictly pedagogical sense, but if you prove to be a good neighbour - you may at some point be surprised at how much cooperation there may be for you. The most telling evidence is the way in which the Free Trade Area with the EU is being developing and how the economic embargoes imposed by the Russian Federation have been largely overcome.

It's an illusion to think that you can stay isolated from the global phenomena

■ ***What are the trends in the world today?***

■ In order to answer this question, we should look with the eyes wide open at what is happening around us - and look far beyond the physical and mental boundaries. We will see then, more and more distinctly, how the so-called *Asian century* is growing, when an important part of the world economy is being increasingly concentrated in several very strong Asian countries. And in parallel with this - at least at the perception level - we have the feeling that the United States is withdrawing from several strategic areas. And then, of course, somebody is trying to fill the void, whether we are talking about Africa or the Middle East... It is a fact that the global competition is now increasingly fierce - and Eastern Europe is not mentally prepared for it. An exception in this sense is Poland, which has achieved spectacular results in recent years, being the only developed country in the region. Otherwise, beyond patriotic-nationalist-populist speeches, we see a great void of leadership and vision in Eastern Europe.

■ ***But on both sides of the Prut, people prefer to think that, if they remain small and silent, they will not be challenged...***

■ Today it's an illusion to think that you can stay isolated from the global

phenomena and that they will pass unnoticed. It may work for a while, but sooner or later, you will start feeling the competition. For instance, at some point there will be no work in the village, and you will have to move to towns. Or you might need to move to another country. The better you prepare for that, the readier you will be to compete in multiple areas.

■ ***Regarding the competition, by the way, how did you find the electoral Chisinau?***

■ I think there is a lot of stubbornness shown by the three key-political poles and I am afraid that, if it is to believe the results of the polls, we will have a blocked parliament and a strange period of time immediately after the elections. For if no one gives up on its self-importance and accepts a compromise, there may be several months which will end up in early elections, or we will find out at the end of that period that someone has strengthened his power. In my opinion, a new pro-European coalition is optimal, but it is very unlikely because of the tensions between those parties. And these parties should think it hard whether such a coalition is really so dramatic in the situation where the ruling alternative could be PSRM.

■ ***How do you think the year 2019 is going to be?***

■ Turbulent - here, in Romania, in Europe, globally. Whether we like it or not, there are certain aggressive tendencies in the world, in the European and national public space that lead polarization to extremes. That is why it's imperative to calm down on the level of public discourse and to start a real discussion about the challenges ahead. And with that, let us re-learn to find the consensus which is so necessary today.

■ ***Thank you for the interview.***

Sorina Ștefăruță

Expert opinion



Dionis Cenușă: **„The expectations of the Moldovan authorities from the Romanian EU Presidency are far too high”**

The Romanian Presidency of the European Union Council has generated expectations not only in the EU. Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Iurie Leanca, is convinced that: “The success of Romania will be the success of the Republic of Moldova”. According to him, this mandate is a unique opportunity to intensify the EU-Moldova relationship from political dialogue and the reform process to energy and infrastructure interconnection projects, by building bridges and highways. “In addition to the multiple challenges faced by the EU, Romania has the responsibility and the chance to keep the development of its eastern neighbourhood at the forefront of the EU agenda. Last but not least, we are counting on the Bucharest support for generating a wider debate in the EU about the need to offer Chisinau a clear membership perspective”, said Iurie Leanca.

Also, the Prime Minister Pavel Filip has expectations from the current EU Presidency. During the meeting with

Teodor Melescanu, the Romanian Foreign Minister, Pavel Filip mentioned that the Republic of Moldova is relying on Romania to strengthen the EU’s support for the realization of the European agenda of our country. The Chisinau Chief Executive sent a similar message to his Bucharest counterpart, Viorica Dăncilă. “We welcome the intention of the Romanian Presidency to launch strategic reflections on the future of cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries (PaE). It is important for the Republic of Moldova that the EaP countries adjust in the future, in a more harmonious manner, the needs of technical and sectoral cooperation to the long-term political priorities of the Eastern partners, especially of the three associated countries”, says the letter signed by Premier Pavel Filip.

To what extent are these expectations justified, but also achievable, in a similarly complicated political context in Chisinau, Bucharest and the European Union? We can find answers to this

question from the political analyst Dionis Cenușă, associate expert with “Expert-Grup” and researcher at the Justus-Liebig Gießen University, Germany. Please note that the article is based on the interview given by Dionis Cenușă to the Radio “Free Europe” on the 4th of January.

About expectations and realities

Normally, a neighbouring country with multiple close ties with the Republic of Moldova, such as Romania, should be a major asset for improving our dialogue with the EU and for developing bilateral relations with European assistance - and here I refer, first of all, to gas interconnection. The reality is different though. Romania has taken over the EU Presidency, being technically prepared, but unprepared politically. That is why this Presidency can bring limited benefits to the Republic of Moldova. In addition, being in a weak state itself, Romania may not have the capacity to promote the pro-Moldova agenda during its

European Presidency. And if we look at Romania's priorities for the six months of the EU presidency, we will see very little mentioning about the Eastern Partnership (PaE), which includes the Republic of Moldova. So most likely Romania will not be able to be an active actor in promoting the agenda of the Republic of Moldova, and at the same time, Bucharest will be more likely to turn a blind eye to certain situations in Chisinau ...

About the capacity to intensify the EU-Moldova relationship

Of course, the expectations of the Moldovan authorities - that the Romanian EU Presidency can effectively promote some messages from Chisinau - are far too high. At the same time, Romania has somehow assumed a moral commitment to support the Republic of Moldova in all its pro-European endeavours. This moral commitment is somewhat contradictory to what Romania can do in reality, given that the EU is divided on many subjects, on which Romania, being itself divided internally, has to create cohesion and confluence. The European circumstances today don't allow Romania to use its traditional resources to venture that far as to promote the Chisinau government interests if the power doesn't change

after the February 2019 parliamentary elections.

About the benefits and beneficiaries of the Romanian EU Presidency

Firstly, it depends on how the elections will take place and who wins them, including who will form the future government in Chisinau. Secondly, it depends on how powerful the pro-European opposition will be after the elections. If the opposition gets enough seats to create empathy towards the EU among the population, obviously there will be support for the reforms that the EU wants for the Moldovan citizens and which have so far been either partially accomplished or postponed. So only when we see the election results can we talk about how beneficial the Romanian EU Presidency can really be. Because, as I mentioned, if the Opposition has a say in the future Parliament, the last months of the Romanian EU Presidency could be very beneficial to the Republic of Moldova.

About macro-financial assistance and its possible resumption after the elections

The EU has a basic principle in relation to any country in its neighbourhood

and beyond, and namely: if citizens choose a government, Brussels will be in dialogue with that government. So, if the citizens of the Republic of Moldova (whether they are bribed or not to do it) vote for a government led by the Democrats, the EU will have a dialogue with that government and will try to re-establish the normal cooperation, including the resumption of talks on the macro-financial assistance as well as on the conditions which the Moldovan government had tried to meet by the end of 2018. In its statements, the EU Delegation to Chisinau has also favoured the idea that if the government is democratically elected, the EU will communicate with it. So, it depends on how serious the abuses of democratic standards are going to be. However, from what we have seen so far, the Democrats are not at risk of going through very radical scenarios, so the elections will most probably be acceptable for the EU to discuss with the future parties which will form the government. So, the fewer mistakes in the electoral process, the greater the chance that the EU will resume the talks on the macro-financial assistance for the Republic of Moldova, including the budgetary assistance, and by the end of 2019 Moldova will have been delivered the first tranches.

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



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



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