

The Newsletter is based on the radio programme broadcast on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, produced by the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova in partnership with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). The programme is broadcast on the Radio Moldova public channel and on the Vocea Basarabiei Radio. The programme is part of the FES/APE "Foreign Policy Dialogues" Project. The content can be reproduced by mentioning the source.

# NEWSLETTER

MONTHLY BULLETIN • APRIL 2015 • NR.3 (108)

## Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The materials are realized by Lina Grau, foreign policy expert and programme coordinator with APE.

### TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. Unprecedented decrease in the support for the European integration. The causes and consequences analysed by the director of the Public Policy Institute, **Arcadie Barbaroșie**.
2. To change things, we need to become active citizens and not remain inhibited residents, says the executive director of ADEPT, **Igor Botan**.
3. **Michael Emerson**, expert at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels, says the European course is not lost, but its delay is not doing any good to Moldova.
4. **Nicu Popescu**, expert at the European Institute for Security Studies in Paris: Corruption is pulling down the support for the ideas promoted by the government.

Last period has been marked by a series of important events for the Republic of Moldova.



After one year since the liberalization of the visa regime with the European Union the authorities in Chisinau have registered about half a million of Moldovan citizens' travels to the European destinations. The visa regime was liberalized on 28 April 2014, when Moldova became the first and the only country of the Eastern Partnership which benefited from visa-free regime with the EU.



The exports to the EU countries in January and February increased by 6.7% compared to the same period of 201, accounting for 67.3% of total exports, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. On the other hand, the exports to the CIS countries, where Moldova sells a fifth of its products, fell by 46% compared to the last year.



France has become the 18<sup>th</sup> EU country to ratify the Association Agreement with the Republic of Moldova. Before the vote on April 16<sup>th</sup> in the National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament, some of the speakers said Moldova is "the most democratic country of the EU's Eastern neighbourhood."



The speaker of the Moldovan Parliament, Andrian Candu, published on his blog the report of the Kroll company that investigated the theft of over one billion dollars in three Moldovan banks, called "the theft of the century". The amount stolen accounts virtually for half of the liquidities of the banking system. The report listed several known figures of the Moldovan politics, of which the businessman Ilan Shor, who was put under house arrest, and five other people who are under accusation. The minister of Education, Maia Sandu, said Moldova is a "captive state" and that the state institutions "must have been in a deep coma" if they did not react to this theft.



"Enlargement of the European Union is not planned for the next decade at least, said Johannes Hahn, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement", at a forum in Berlin. "This does not mean the EU will not negotiate with the interested countries during that period," added Hahn.

On the other hand, the European Council President, Donald Tusk, said in Chisinau that Moldova is "a key associate" of the EU, but it must do real reforms in the judiciary, fighting against corruption and restoring of the banking sector. Donald Tusk took part in the meeting of the Governmental Commission for European Integration to discuss how the Association Agreement is applied as well as the reforms that the Moldovan government committed to implement.



## Unprecedented decrease in the support for the European integration. Causes and consequences



The spring edition of the *Barometer of Public Opinion (BOP)* conducted by the *Public Policy Institute (IPP)* in

Chisinau has revealed an unprecedented decrease in the popularity of the European integration idea.

After years and years of the Moldovan society being divided almost equally between the eastern and western option, the European vector having a slight supremacy, this time only 40% of respondents have expressed support for the European integration idea, which is the lowest percentage the BOP has ever recorded since its launch in 2003. The number of those who support the Eurasian vector reached an absolute record - 58% of respondents say they would vote for Moldova's integration into the Customs Union.

Almost half think it is correct to say: "Crimea is Russian land" and more than 40% believe the tensions and the crisis in eastern Ukraine were caused by the interference of the United States and the European Union.

The survey's authors have noted an almost absolute decline in the popularity for the minority coalition parties - the Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) and the Democratic Party (PDM) – and a rise of the Liberal Party (PL) which remained outside the coalition. On the other hand, the figures show that the leftist pro- Eurasian parties would get the majority of votes had the elections been organised. Thus, the Socialist Party of Moldova (PSRM) is leading in voters' preferences with 30%, followed by Our Party of Renato Usatîi, which is still not officially registered- 24%, the Communist Party - 23%, PL - 22%, PLDM - 16%, and PDM - 14%.

As to voters' confidence in the Moldovan leaders, the former prime minister, Iurie Leanca, holds the first position with 8.8%, followed by the Socialist leader, Igor Dodon, with 8.6%, and the PCRM leader, Vladimir Voronin, with 6.4%. At the same time, almost half of respondents say they do not trust anyone.

## **Arcadie Barbaroşie: Strategically speaking, there is no other way than the European integration. To understand that, there might be need for one or two more legislatures**



**D**irector of the Public Policy Institute, **Arcadie Barbaroşie, sees several reasons for the collapse of the European idea popularity. According to him, Moldova does not have any other option than the European development vector. In order to understand that, it seems that the Moldovan society, as well as the political class, need some more time.**

■ **Lina Grâu:** The results of the last Barometer of Public Opinion (BOP) have been rather unexpected when it comes to the sharp decrease in the popularity of the European integration idea. As a co-author of BOP, how do you explain this trend? What has actually happened in the Moldovan society? Why is there such a decrease in the European vector support?

■ **Arcadie Barbaroşie:** In fact, we have noticed this trend in the previous surveys, starting with 2011. The scepticism trend has strengthened as well as the trend towards the integration into the so-called Customs Union, the Eurasian Union which does not even exist.

There are several factors that determine the mood of the society. To understand which factor is the most important, we need to look at the questions related to the people's needs and problems. They are material problems and have to do primarily with the living standards. The greatest fears are related to the prices, wages, the future of children, unemployment and, more recently, a new problem appeared - the war in the area, which until a year and half ago did not bother the people at all.

■ **Lina Grâu:** But there is a better prospect in the EU when it comes to all the above-mentioned aspects. Why is there such a drop in the popularity of the European vector?

■ **Arcadie Barbaroşie:** This is another aspect. People have expected that these concerns will be resolved by the government. Since 2009 we have had a pro-European government and the situation has worsened. The citizens' conclusion is that the pro-European parties cannot ensure what they promised and thus, the citizens' hopes and expectations did not find any answer in the performance of the government. Hence the great disappointment and conclusions like: "They are liars and what they promise cannot in principle be realized."

So, the most important factor which strengthened this euro-pessimistic trend is the poor quality of governance which was not able to meet the citizens' needs.

Moreover, the governments that we have had in the last years had in their name, in one form or another, the word "European" - the "pro-European alliance" and the "pro-European coalition". This

has triggered a psychological impact in the sense that: "Look, these pro-Europeans have done nothing but to undermine the pro-European idea in Moldova". Because if you say you are pro-European, you have to realize through the government programmes the European values and get closer to the European model of governance. This thing did not happen and hence the severe decline in the support of the European course of the Republic of Moldova. This has been the most important factor.

The second factor is the global financial-economic crisis, which affected the growth of the economy in the Republic of Moldova that relies largely on remittances. The volume of remittances has fallen and some of our fellow citizens that work in Russia, having lost their jobs, are returning home, especially after the embargos imposed by Russia.

On the other hand, when you look at the media reports, including the European TV stations, at what is happening in the European countries, you will see protests in Greece, fires, clashes with the police, and demonstrations in Spain ... You will not see though that, for example, the German citizens have been leading a good life, including during the crisis. More than that, Germany has even supported some countries in crisis. But the citizens' conclusion is that the things there are getting worse.

But if we look eastwards ... There is a second very important factor here, which is the Russian media that has practically occupied the entire informational space of Moldova. The Russian media is of a better quality from the consumerist point of view than the local channels. It promotes in an absolutely appalling propagandistic style values which found some echo in the minds of our citizens. It does not talk about problems in the East, of course. Instead, it promoted the Eurasian Union, their leaders, especially Putin, the latter enjoying the highest level

of confidence in Moldova when it comes to international leaders. And the impact is the one we see - the Eurasian Union has a growing support of our electorate. In order to imagine the power of the Russian propaganda - 80 percent of our ethnic Ukrainian co-nationals support the Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine. It is rather serious that the Chisinau government does nothing to counteract these actions.

Another factor is the role of the Russian church in the Republic of Moldova. The Moldovan Church is subordinate to the Moscow Church which is promoting pro-Eastern values here. Over 11 percent of the respondents are sure that as we get closer to the EU, we will be forced to adhere to Catholicism and about as many believe we will not have the right to put crosses in cemeteries. So a number of myths is haunting, being promoted namely by the Orthodox Church subordinated to Moscow. And again, no action has been taken in this regard. The Government is trying to use the church in their own interest, without actually gaining support from this institution. And this institution, again, enjoys the highest level of confidence among the population according to the polls - over 80 percent.

Perhaps a very important factor would be the psychological fear for change. In one of the surveys conducted last year the respondents stated that the EU is actually better on 23 of the 25 dimensions that we have measured – the standards of living, medicine, education, roads, police, small business, the situation of the youth, etc. However, most would opt for integration into the Customs Union. And when we tried to understand the reason, our conclusion was that, in fact, the people are psychologically unprepared for integration into the West, in the EU as they are afraid of change. The people are familiar with what happens in the East – they know the language and the habits, know that the police take bribes, but also that if you've given bribe, you can avoid

punishment etc. Speaking about the West, people don't know much about it and don't speak the language...

■ **Lina Grău:** How do you think the citizens will vote in the upcoming local elections that will determine the future of Moldova for at least the next four years?

■ **Arcadie Barbaroșie:** In general, at the local level people don't vote politically as in the parliamentary elections. In local elections, people vote personalities - mayors or councillors they know - rather than political parties. But I presume that in the June elections the great fight will be in Chisinau, between the pro-European and pro-Eastern segments of the electorate.

As to Balti, it seems to be lost – the Balti town is pro-Russian. Until now, the Communists have won the elections. I don't think the Communists have any chance this time. It is the Socialists or Renato's Usatî party that will win the elections in Balti. And we can expect big surprises from the behaviour of that administration.

In Chisinau, the balance is rather fragile, I think. Here, the pro-European side may win the elections though the risk is very high it may lose them.

■ **Lina Grău:** In the last elections, the victory of the Liberal Dorin Chirtoaca was at a few thousand votes distance from his counter-candidate...

■ **Arcadie Barbaroșie:** Yes, Chirtoaca's victory in the last local elections was mainly due to the suburbs...

■ **Lina Grău:** Is it possible to have the same situation now?

■ **Arcadie Barbaroșie:** Yes, the more so that after 2011 things have worsened in terms of the economic situation. People are discontent with the performance of the Chisinau government.

**Lina Grău:** Given this situation that you describe in gloomy colours...

**Arcadie Barbaroșie:** Not gloomy, realistic!

**Lina Grău:** ... realistic but gloomy for Moldova's European perspective. Does this mean a collapse of the European integration process in Moldova? Is there a chance to save this course which they used to call "The Eastern Partnership success story"?

**Arcadie Barbaroșie:** Good question – it depends very much on the performance of the current government.

The current government has had a rather anaemic behaviour so far, while Moldova is in need of reforms now - profound and structural reforms in economy, justice and in combating corruption. Perhaps the most pressing action and the most urgent results expected by the citizens are to get clarification as to what happened to the three banks, primarily to the Savings Bank. The cases that some politicians talk about should be taken to court. We do not know yet whether the individuals responsible or the politicians who stood behind these machinations will be punished. This is what citizens expect now. And this is urgent though it is clear that the things will not precipitate until the local elections.

Personally, I don't think the risk of parliamentary elections is that high. The Parliament will be carrying its mandate for the entire period of four years. The parties currently in government - the Democrats and the Liberal Democrats, backed by the Communists – are not interested in early elections as they are all on a downward trend. So they will not force early elections. The Gaburici government may fall, but the Parliament will not. So far, the Gaburici government has been behaving in accordance with the interests of those who have formed it.

**Lina Grău:** And then, we need reforms, but a minority coalition is not capable of reforms. Could this lead to a collapse of the European integration process?

**Arcadie Barbaroșie:** I'm not saying this coalition is not capable of reforms. This coalition is in a very interesting situation. On the one hand, yes, it is not interested in reforms, and has corrupt personalities – this is what the media says- but we have not seen this in court. The former ministers from the coalition parties are under accusation and investigation by the National Anti-Corruption Centre. We'll see what happens to these cases in the court.

On the one hand, they are not interested in promoting deep reforms in the fighting against corruption, judicial reform, etc. On the other hand, there is pressure from the society. So they are between hammer and anvil. If the local elections are a total catastrophe for the governing parties, things can precipitate. There is a potential for protests in the society - about 25 percent of respondents said they are ready to participate in legal protests if such are organised. Of course, not all 25 percent will take to the streets, but even if a tenth of them does, that is already very, very much. The people in power should take account of this potential as it could translate into social unrest.

**Lina Grău:** In conclusion, what is the perspective of the European course of the Republic of Moldova?

**Arcadie Barbaroșie:** Strategically speaking, I am optimistic. If the current or the next government will not orient themselves towards European integration, the following one will do so. There is no other way. It depends on whether Russia falls in the next four years, or this will last for another four years. What is happening in the East, especially in eastern Ukraine is a very important factor that will influence the geostrategic course of the Republic of Moldova.

**Lina Grău:** So, we went from the prospect of applying for membership in half a year at the Riga summit to the prospect of several legislatures...

**Arcadie Barbaroșie:** I was sceptical about the promises of politicians to apply for membership that soon, because, objectively speaking, the country is not ready.

Greece was not ready to join the EU when it did. I believe that neither Romania nor Bulgaria were ready to join. At present, in Romania, fundamental things are happening in the area of anti-corruption activities. Is it due to the European integration or is it because of the direct confrontation between the Presidency and the Government - I do not know. But we are not ready, neither administratively nor economically to integrate into the EU now. We need, in my view, at least 10 years to strengthen the economy, infrastructure, administrative capacities and promote the reforms the country needs. Our officials are largely illiterate and this is something you cannot change in a day or two.

But we already have two dimensions that the citizens may consider as a fundamental rapprochement to the EU. It is the visa-free regime and the Free Trade Area with the EU. These are very important things. The next step would be to obtain full membership with voting rights in the European parliament. I do not know if our citizens are very interested in the voting. It is rather that some politicians would be interested in becoming MEPs.

So we are already very close to the European Union. What is left is to strengthen our institutions and the administrative capacity in order to apply for membership and, very important, that the application is not denied.

## **Igor Boțan: The banner carriers have turned out to be false and they have to be changed**



**Igor Boțan, the executive director of the Association for Participatory Democracy (ADEPT), says the parties of the ruling coalition which have compromised through their actions the European idea must leave, while the people should become active citizens and exercise pressure on the corrupt political class with a view to working on the European integration.**

■ **Lina Grău:** The Public Opinion Barometer shows a dramatic drop in the support for the European course. What happened?

■ **Igor Boțan:** The citizens conclude that under the guise of European integration the corrupt political clans are solving their own problems, getting richer, while the citizens are getting disappointed and desperate. This involution of the expectations for the European vector is explained by the fact that the banner carriers proved to be false. The banner remains for a large part of society as a landmark, while the carriers have to be probably changed.

■ **Lina Grău:** How can we change the banner carriers since the political class

is the one we have and what we are witnessing is not just an economic and social collapse, but also a collapse of the political class – there are no prominent political leaders?

■ **Igor Boțan:** In this respect, things might develop, taking into account the need for raising civic activism. The situation requires new leaders and the new leaders must manifest themselves and demonstrate they have ambitions to take over the government.

There are circumstances that are conducive to such changes. Let us not forget that the Association Agreement has been signed and is mandatory. The document provides for financial instruments to support the Republic of Moldova, which depend very much on the continuation of reforms and the fight against corruption. The second thing we all know is that in the last 10 years, Moldova has enjoyed substantial financial support from the development partners and no government can afford to ignore this support. So there exist levers of pressure on the government.

There is also a regional context and Ukraine's resistance. If Ukraine holds, Moldova has chances. If Ukraine doesn't hold, the fate of the Republic of Moldova will be dramatic, because a corrupt government will not be able to deal with the problems generated by a possible failure of Ukraine in its confrontation with the Russian Federation.

■ **Lina Grău:** What will be the implications in the coming period of the decline in the popularity of the European integration idea and of the parties that have promoted this idea given the upcoming local elections?

■ **Igor Boțan:** The implications could be rather serious. In the voting for district councils, where they vote for party lists and where the party logos count, the current Government can receive severe reprimand from the citizens. If a minority government receives reprimand from the citizens, this government will have to leave. It will be then that the parties which are not involved in corruption scandals will have to manifest themselves.

There are also other major implications. What are these political parties? It is the parliamentary opposition which has an anti-European message, but it is in an extremely difficult situation. The promises of parliamentary opposition to cancel the Association Agreement will certainly have dramatic consequences for Moldova. At the same time, the hopes that Russia will replace the EU are ephemeral. We can see already that Russia is no longer able to support Transnistria. The costs for keeping Transnistria afloat accounted for one billion dollars a year. Now Russia has to support also Crimea, Donbass ... Russia will have substantial losses in the trade with Belarus, after signing the Agreement on the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union. So, it is a great illusion that Russia can substitute the European Union.

There is another very important factor here – breaking the relations with the EU means giving up the modernization of Moldova. The offers that can possibly come from the Russian Federation have

two dimensions: market reopening, though the Russian citizens cannot give a good price for Moldovan products, and the expected reduction in the natural gas price. These are prerequisites for freezing Moldova in its own backwardness. So, the hopes for further normalization will be dramatically undermined.

■ **Lina Grâu:** The picture you have described does not seem at all optimistic for the future of Moldova in case the European integration course is slowed down or dropped. Can we talk about a collapse of the European integration and of the European course of Moldova or we can still recover something?

■ **Igor Boțan:** I believe that we should not go desperate, even if we understand that the situation is extremely complicated. There is certainly the idea of a consecutive order of steps to be taken, including by the Moldovan citizens. A billion of dollars was stolen not just in the last year, but over the years. This means that the direct responsibility for this huge theft or, as they call it the "theft of the century", belongs to the two parties in power and the Communist Party that supports the current government. It is about those who have governed the country together for 15 years, ie at least two thirds of Moldova's independence period. These political parties have no longer any excuse. The current government must leave.

■ **Lina Grâu:** In the last parliamentary elections the scarecrow was that if these parties don't stay in power, other parties will come to power which oppose the idea of the European integration. The people then have voted for the ruling parties, although with reservations, in order not to miss the European course. If these parties withdraw from power, isn't it likely that the communists and socialists will take over the power, possibly in coalition with the Democratic Party, that are in favour of a different external vector?

■ **Igor Boțan:** If you look at the opinion poll that we have started the discussion from, we will see that the European vector

is lost in terms of the citizens' support. What is the point in keeping a corrupt government which is discrediting the European idea? It is better that it leaves.

If eventually the parties that want to change the foreign vector come to power, the situation will be difficult, but not dramatic as long as, I said, Ukraine holds. If Ukraine does hold, I believe that those who come to change the foreign vector will very, very soon have great disillusionment. It can happen that the Republic of Moldova needs to pass through a new phase of despair that will be caused already by those who want to change the vector and who will certainly face problems that will not be able to solve, because the Russian market is not a panacea for Moldova.

So it might be necessary to go through this period. The ultimate goal is that these tests, if we are still a Christian country and relate to the Biblical legends as to the archetypes of searching for destiny, then we must remember the 40 years that the Jewish people had to spend in the desert in order to reach the Promised Land.

There is no other way out. We must engage in this process and my opinion is that it is better to start going out of this stagnation in the mire of absolute corruption, taking into account the regional context, the international factors, and our internal capacity. So, there is no other way out, because if we keep these political forces, they will further discredit the European vector.

■ **Lina Grâu:** As a remark related to the 40 years - we have wiser examples like the one of the Baltic states, which did not need that long a period...

■ **Igor Boțan:** I believe that the example of the Baltic countries is not relevant for Moldova. Nobody seems to remember that immediately after the collapse of the USSR, the Scandinavian countries have established a special fund of several billion dollars to help these countries. We haven't had that. We cannot compare

Romania of the early 90s with Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway ... Also, we cannot overlook that the annexation of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union has never been recognized by the international community. And this has not been the case of Bessarabia. In addition, there was a civic political culture in the Baltic countries compare to the parochial one in Moldova.

Now we can get support from Romania, which is engaged in a very important process, showing how to combat corruption, pointing out at the internal and external factors in order to have an effective fight against corruption. We must learn from this experience and import the positive examples in the Republic of Moldova.

It is us, the citizens of Moldova that should take this road. But before embarking on this road, we should become citizens and not just inhibited residents. That is the most important thing.

Unfortunately, our state of inhibited residents was used by the profiteers, who under the banner of the European integration, have simply mocked the country and the fate of Moldova.

Luckily for us, if we can only call it luck, the Republic of Moldova is so dependent on the international support that this clique or gang in power cannot afford to resort to dictatorial methods as this would be absolutely unacceptable for international partners, without whom they would not be able to survive and lead the country. We saw this when they attempted to brutally hit the freedom of the press and when they had to step back. It is a good example which should encourage the Moldovan citizens. So, the government doesn't have the resources to resort to violent and dictatorial measures.

Therefore if the citizens' protests and actions are well-organized and targeted, peaceful, avoiding all sorts of provocations, this government will start staggering and will ultimately fall. And then the citizens will have to pave a new path toward a future that they must understand it cannot be outside the European context.

**Michael Emerson: If not now, you can try it after several years. The delay, though, will not do any good to the country.**



**M**ichael Emerson, associate senior researcher with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels, says the implementation of the Association Agreement will bring professionalization of the government, less corruption and clearer rules. The delay in these processes is primarily at the expense of the Republic of Moldova and its citizens.

■ **Lina Grău:** In the Moldovan society, the popularity of the European integration idea has decreased. Why do you think this happened and what can be done to improve the situation?

■ **Michael Emerson:** I'm not an expert on Moldova, but when there is an economic recession, normally, the party in power suffers. The Moldovan government has, first of all, to win the confidence of its people in terms of core Moldovan politics and economic policy.

The first thing they have got to do with respect to the European policy is a bit

more openness in implementing the Association and the Free Trade Area Agreement which represents in due course huge opportunities for two things- one is what we have been discussing with the Government and think tanks in Chisinau this week, at the beginning of our project on this subject. There would be two aspects –one is the modernization of regulation of the society and the economy. There is a huge amount of European laws which Moldova has committed to adopting within 3-5 years, which will, in principle, improve the quality of the regulation and in particular, reduce corruption. That is the regulatory quality point.

The second point is the openness to the European economy for trade. The Moldovan business is working on learning how to follow the European technical correct standards. There you have a huge market for Moldova and if you get to act together you can thus expand your exports.

The Association Agreement and DCFTA represent very important opportunities

for Moldova in two respects: of course, it opens huge perspectives on the European market if your export can get itself organized following the European standards, but secondly, and this is less obvious- modernization, improved efficiency, less corruption in the regulation of the economy. There are huge numbers of European regulatory laws which Moldova is going to apply now.

We have been discussing these last days with the business representatives whether these European laws are going to help or not. One case after the other, the story is if you like labour market laws, customs laws, environmental laws, they need to be seriously improved and here you have a blueprint to do it.

■ **Lina Grău:** Do you think Moldovan government has the ability to do these things?

■ **Michael Emerson:** You have a government at different levels- top political level, senior bureaucrats, deputy ministers, heads of departments. I don't know the politicians. I know some of them, but not really. But we have been talking to people more at the deputy minister level - there is a good number of good people there. They are well-informed and quite a number of them have been in and out in Brussels- they have worked for the Moldovan delegation missions to the EU. They came back and they know the stuff. Of course, there is a problem with having an adequate supply of excellent people that you need, but it's not that bad. By the way, the number of women I see in senior administration positions is very impressive.

■ **Lina Grău:** Do you think Russia will accept and admit the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU smoothly, without trying to prevent Moldova from advancing with that?

■ **Michael Emerson:** It's not Russia's prerogative to accept or not to accept. This

is a sovereign decision of the Moldovan government. Of course, you see what's happening in Ukraine and you know all about that, but the interesting point which is topical today since president Tusk was in Moldova today and he was in Kiev yesterday, the Agreement with the European Union is where we want no further delay in the implementation of the Ukraine-EU Free Trade Agreement. Russia had a meeting last week in Brussels- a trilateral meeting with the EU and Ukraine- saying that they would like now to postpone the application of this agreement until 2020. The polite answer by president Tusk was that there would be no further delay. The less polite answer would be: "Get lost!"

■ **Lina Grâu:** What will happen to Moldova if it fails to implement this agreement?

■ **Michael Emerson:** This is a long process, but it's inevitable business. In a sense, it's not particularly European. The question is whether, from the professional point of view, you will improve the quality of Government or not. Now and maybe if not now, try again in 5 years' time, but is it worthwhile delaying of getting on with the business? No.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Is Moldova a European country?

■ **Michael Emerson:** Yes, of course. You are not in Central Asia, are you?

I would say yes, in terms of my own view. I lived in Russia and I'm following the Russian affairs and the policies pursued by president Putin and I think that this is bad policy. Talking about the European values, the question of morality and honesty in public life and Putin's policy of denial of intervening in Ukraine and labelling Kiev as run by fascists, this is disgustingly immoral. And to join, if you like, the Customs Union led by Russia means joining a club. That is how it works.

## **Nicu Popescu: Corruption is pulling down the support for any idea promoted by the government.**



**Nicu Popescu, expert with the European Institute for Security Studies in Paris, says that at present, in Moldova, corruption is the key issue that was not resolved and that will pull down the support for any idea promoted by the government, whatever that will be - pro-European or pro-Eurasian.**

■ **Nicu Popescu:** In the recent years there has been a decline in the public support for the European integration idea. These trends have several explanations.

One explanation is that, unlike during the communist government, there is less political consensus among the elites regarding the European integration. In other words, during the communist government, both the communists and the opposition had an open pro-European message. Virtually the entire political class, at least formally, spoke with one voice.

When the PCRM went in opposition the declarative and formal consensus has eroded. We can speculate that the communists reduced the support

for the European integration by approximately 10-15 percent. This is purely mathematical, though speculative.

With respect to governance, any government is disappointing. Governments disappoint in good times, but during economic crises they disappoint even more. And obviously, they disappoint even more against the dysfunctions showed the government in Chisinau.

When referring to failures, I mean primarily lack of progress in fighting against corruption, but also the conflicts within the coalition, breaking of alliances and parties, failure to form a majority government ... So, this situation of permanent political scandal does not look good in any country. In the situation when the government hasn't practically done anything to fight against corruption and has been systematically involved in quarrels and competitions, part of the disappointment with the government was projected on the idea of European integration following the logic "the pro-European government is not good

and is not fighting against corruption. We don't need such Europe". As far as I am concerned, this is how the pro-European consensus has been eroded.

Much of this erosion would have been inevitable even if the Chisinau government fought against corruption and did not argue within the coalition. We could have anyway had this significant drop in the support for European integration but that would have dropped from 65-70 percent to perhaps 50 percent. But obviously, the current government's behaviour has made it worse.

■ **Lina Grâu:** What are the prospects under these circumstances for the European course of the Republic of Moldova?

■ **Nicu Popescu:** If we try to project things in the future, including looking at the case of Ukraine, we will notice a certain trend.

In Ukraine the following processes took place:

- In 2004, the orange revolution against Kuchma and Yanukovich took place under pro-European slogans.
- During the orange government between 2005-2010, the support for the European integration has fallen sharply, because the Ukrainians' dissatisfaction with Tymoshenko-Yushchenko has turned into a big disappointment, including in the European integration idea. By the end of the orange governance, only 28 percent were in favour of the European integration, while the Customs Union enjoyed a support of 54 percent. That was in 2008, after three years of scandals of the orange coalition.
- With the coming to power of Yanukovich, the people got quickly disappointed in him. The

attractiveness of the Eurasian integration started to decline, while the popularity of the European integration was on the rise. Thus, in October 2013, before the Euromaidan, the support for the EU grew to 47 percent, while that of the Eurasian Union dropped to 32 percent. So the dissatisfaction with Yanukovich turned into disappointment by Russia.

If we extrapolate, it is likely that if, theoretically, there are changes in the government of the Republic of Moldova and a pro-Eurasian government comes to power, it is virtually inevitable that it will not solve the problems overnight in Moldova. Looking at the pro-Eurasian forces there are doubts they will quickly and efficiently fight against corruption and it is practically inevitable that these forces will disappoint. In that case it is not difficult to assume that the support for the EU will start growing, while that for the Eurasian Union will decline.

There is a certain degree of inevitability of such political tendencies, which are aggravated by the country's inability to solve problems. Today, corruption is a key issue which if not solved, will drag down the support for any idea promoted by any government.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Is the publication of the Kroll report seen as a proof of fighting against corruption or as a struggle between parties?

■ **Nicu Popescu:** Fighting against corruption is not done through reports. The reporting and, secondly, there is the publication of reports. Combatting corruption is done by investing state institutions responsible for fighting corruption with functions, but also with independence from politicians. This thing did not happen in Moldova, when the decision was taken for the Prosecutor's Office, the National Anticorruption Center and the

Ministry of Interior to be distributed according to the political algorithm. So, the decision not to fight against corruption and to subordinate these institutions to the political interests was taken long ago. Now whether the Kroll report will be made public or not is not a testament to the Fight against corruption. The most telling evidence is that they did not invest in the establishment of independent institutions.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Is the protest mood in the society, the meetings organized by non-political pro-European forces likely to hold the political class and government accountable?

■ **Nicu Popescu:** Any significant protest sends signals to the political class and the latter always reacts to such protests, even if there are no clear leaders of this movement. The question is what will be the reaction and if whether the lessons learned from this new political reality will lead to an intensification of the fight against corruption or just to aggravation of the competition between parties that does not aim at fighting against corruption, but rather at camouflaging the abuses committed so far.

■ **Lina Grâu:** Can Russia be considered to some extent the architect of this situation in Moldova? In any case, it did have an interest in what is happening. Will it benefit from the effects of this crisis of the center-right political segment?

■ **Nicu Popescu:** Obviously, Russia would like to benefit and is already benefiting from the trends in recent years – decrease in the support for the European integration, the rise of the Eurasian integration popularity, the growing popularity of such politicians as Dodon or Usatîi who have a strong pro-Russian message. So, Russia is the beneficiary of these trends and,

obviously, where it could do it, it tried to contribute to these trends, including through the embargoes.

But ultimately, the decisions that led to the destabilization of the banking system, the non-transparent sales of both the airport and of the Savings Banks shares, the Government's decision to guarantee the unclear and non-transparent loans – all these are not decisions taken in Moscow, Brussels or Washington. These are decisions taken in Chisinau and are the responsibility of the Moldovan political elite.

■ **Lina Grâu:** We are witnessing not only an economic and social crisis, but also a crisis of the political class and of the center-right pro-European elites. Is there anything one can do about it?

■ **Nicu Popescu:** The current government is in a very serious crisis of credibility and this crisis leads to two effects. The first is the growing

popularity of the Eurasian integration ideas, the rise of the Socialist Party and Usatîi's party. On the other hand, a much more recent effect, and therefore much less institutionalized, is this movement against the center-right parties, which is about one year late compared to the strengthening of the center-left political forces. At present, both the Liberal Party and Iurie Leanca are trying to position themselves on the center-right, anti-government segment, but pro-European. The "Dignity and Truth" Civic Platform is also trying to position itself though it has not yet experienced a political crystallization – did not become yet a party though it started center-right political movement processes. We will see what the results will be of these tectonic movements on the center-right political segment.

Just like two years ago no one could predict that Usatîi would become a very popular politician, perhaps the most popular, on the center-left political segment or that Dodon who

had quit the Communist party would get more votes than the Communists succeeding in denying the PCRM previous domination on the center-left segment, it is not excluded that someone would take the lead on the center-right segment positioning itself anti-governmental and pro-European.

On the other hand, despite all tactics, internal political crises, and positioning of parties, Moldova remains anchored in the Association Agreement with the EU, the implementation of which is a legal obligation. Moldova has free trade area with the EU, which provides important benefits. So despite these political storms in Chisinau, today there are several anchors that keep Moldova into the European space than there were, for example, 13 months ago, before the decision to remove the visa regime. And this, obviously, has beneficial effects, the trend being still positive, despite the constant crises of the Moldovan political class.

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