

Presidential Elections in the Republic of Moldova

Policy paper

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Executive Summary

On November 1, 2020, presidential elections will be lawfully held in the Republic of Moldova. Several active actors have already announced their intention to participate. Others, such as incumbent President Igor Dodon, say tactfully they have not however decided in this regard, although it is very clear they cannot adopt any other political behavior. Although electoral campaigns are internal administrative processes and external interference are not accepted, both external partners and the experts monitor these electoral exercises to predict how economic partnerships and political interactions with the Republic of Moldova will be further developed. The policy paper aims to analyze the main decisions and behaviors of political actors in Romania and Ukraine, and how the bilateral dialogues of these two states with Chisinau have evolved in recent years. We will also reflect on the stakes of these presidential elections in functional terms of defined foreign policy objectives. Thus, the first part of this policy paper is dedicated to a primary analysis of the bilateral dialogue among Bucharest and Chisinau, which were the factors that determined the action or temporary withdrawal of discursive support in different periods, as well as assessing the role of political actors. The second part of the study will be devoted to the evaluation of the partnership between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, but also to the identification of the factors that in recent years have made impossible meetings at the highest level, between heads of state. The last share of the study will be dedicated to the main theses presented by experts from three states - the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine, which constantly monitor the evolution of the political situation in different countries in the region to propose public policy recommendations.

Background - What is the current policy? Why is it being conducted this way?

The neutral foreign policy, promoted by the current President of the Republic of Moldova, Igor Dodon, has caused much confusion among partners. They reflect on the events in Chisinau with concern, avoiding moments of public interaction, which could legitimize or validate the speech of the head of state. Thus, the perception is Igor Dodon is an isolated president, in terms of foreign policy options, being summoned to accept that his foreign policy limits the options for developing consistent partnerships, primarily with his two neighbors: Romania and Ukraine. Both dialogue partners took note of the messages sent by the current head of state but preferred to engage in dialogue with other relevant actors in the political life of the Republic of Moldova. Over time, Igor Dodon's foreign policy agenda has shrunk. Most often he is invited to Moscow, where he has meetings with people close to the leadership of the Russian Federation, but

not necessarily with the Russian head of state, Vladimir Putin. These are clear signs of the erroneous definition of foreign policy priorities because it is dedicated to a single beneficiary - the head of state. The messages sent to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova about the usefulness and efficiency of these visits are extremely vague. Their position produces confusion about the content of the policy promoted by the decision-making authority with responsibilities in this regard, but also reluctance between more partners from Ukraine and Romania.

I. Romanian-Moldovan Relations. Perspectives for the bilateral partnership¹

Preliminary considerations

The socio-political and economic relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova are governed by the strategic nature of these, the basis of the cooperation being the establishment of a strategic partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova.

Since 1991, Romania has pragmatically approached the relationship with the Republic of Moldova, the legitimate interests from a historical point of view, and social structure emphasizing the special character of the cooperation among the two states.

Between 1991 and 2009, Bucharest and Chisinau experienced an extremely uncertain period in terms of political dialogue and economic relations. Although the Romanian authorities remained firmly committed to the project of concrete support of the Republic of Moldova, the interests of certain political groups in Chisinau have made difficult the relationship connecting our countries.

Throughout this period, the Romanian authorities have made efforts for the entire community of citizens of the Republic of Moldova to benefit from sustainable public policies, encouraging the strengthening of ties between the Romanian state and Moldovan citizens through permanent development assistance, the Agreement on cooperation in science and education and culture between the Government of Romania and the Government of the Republic of Moldova since 1993, but also by supporting, at the international level, the demilitarization of the Transnistrian zone.

In 2009, although the communist government in Chisinau tried to charge Romania with anti-establishment protests, the pro-European orientation of the executive after the elections allowed the launch of a recent stage in Romanian-Moldovan relations.

In the new political circumstances, the Moldovan-Romanian bilateral relations have known a stage of stability and constant dialogue on several levels of cooperation, increasing development aid. The constant support provided by Bucharest led to the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union, which allowed the Republic of Moldova to enter into an irreversible process of Europeanization. Romania was the first member state of the European Union to ratify the European Union Association Agreements of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

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Decision-makers in Bucharest have constantly provided a channel of communication with Chisinau, even if the elected Moldovan authorities have chosen to deepen relations with the East. The conditionalities imposed on the Republic of Moldova by the Romanian state consisted in the adoption of successive reforms, the successful democratization of the governing act, economic modernization to increase GDP. In this regard, Romania has supported economic exchanges with Moldova, showing full respect for the commitments made within the Romanian-Moldovan strategic partnership.

In the following, we will present an analytical synthesis of the evolution of bilateral relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova after the 2016 presidential and 2018 general election, but also a forecast of Moldova's foreign policy options in the context of the November 2020 presidential election.

A pro-European partnership and the impact of the presidential election

The Republic of Moldova remains an imperfectly developed foreign policy, the dissensions between the executive and legislative branches endangering the coherence of its international position. On the other hand, the geographical position does not help the Republic of Moldova to be relevant on the European map. Its relevance stems from the counterbalancing of the regional game, the small state being a capital buffer between the geopolitical interests of Europe and those of Russia. In terms of geostrategy, the Republic of Moldova can be considered a geopolitical nexus, but its actions in international relations are practically non-existent. Local government authorities in Chisinau have invariably failed to instantly realize the potential for an effective foreign policy.



Source: Tim Marshall, “Europa de Vest,” in *Prizonierii Geografiei. Zece Hărți Care Îți Spun Tot Ce Trebuie Să Ști Despre Politică Globală* (București: Litera, 2019), 129

The 2016 presidential elections marked a direct change in Moldova's foreign policy, especially as the victory of socialist Igor Dodon strengthened the pro-Russian vector. Although the external policy is not, according to the text of the supreme law, the exclusive attribute of the President, he is obliged to share his duties with the Government which, following Article 96 of the Constitution, is responsible for pursuing foreign policy, based on a government program voted by parliament. In this context, the privileged

relationship that the Republic of Moldova retains with Romania has suffered in terms of political dialogue between foreign policymakers.

The dimensions of the Romanian-Moldovan cooperation have developed in terms of governmental cooperation. The support for the European integration of Moldova remains the prominent concern of the Romanian authorities.

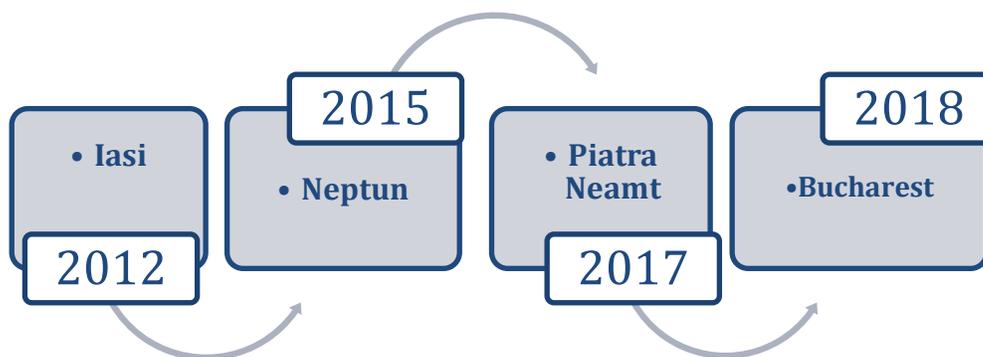
In this case, the contrast between the legitimate interests of this country and those of state leaders is obvious.

Moldova requires reliable partners, with the help of which to make progress in judicial, social, economic, and even political matters, the connection of Moldova to the lines of European cooperation being vital for the existence of the state.

But then, for the oligarchic political system, it does not matter how much Moldovan society progresses. Law-abiding business, cross-party ties and even encouraging separatist movements represent the vital points of interest of the official or unofficial leadership of the state.

Here is the biggest problem of the Romanian-Moldovan relations: Romanian politicians seem too uninterested in the way Moldova's finances are managed, with cross-border affairs critically dependent on a tacit acceptance of irregularities.

Joint meeting of the Governments of Romania and the Republic of Moldova



Within the intergovernmental cooperation, Romania has turned up a partner determined to implement structural reforms and ready to overcome the social crisis in which it finds itself. As long as the Moldovan executive was led by the pro-European parties (government coalitions), Romania and Moldova concluded a series of agreements on:

- ⇒ community development and government reform;
- ⇒ cooperation in the fields of education, research, energy, and security;

⇒ European integration (which took the form of the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union) and the intensification of structural reform;
⇒ justice and home affairs.

The dialogue between the two states suffered because of the presidential administrations in Bucharest and Chisinau. At the beginning of the first presidential term, the President of Romania, Mr Klaus Werner Iohannis, overwhelmingly supported the Republic of Moldova, making two visits to the Capital of Moldova: one as President-elect, and another as President-in-Office. President Iohannis unconditionally supported Moldova's European path, traditionally considering that the place of the Republic of Moldova is within the borders of the European Union. These specific statements aroused sympathy from the pro-European governments in Chisinau and in the presidential chancellery (as long as President Nicolae Timofti served as head of the Moldovan state), but gave rise to differences in relations with President Igor Dodon, taking over the presidency by him.

In this way, the Romanian Presidency and the government sought to limit interactions with Moldova's pro-Russian president but calibrated their official positions on state aid to Moldova (official sponsorships, non-reimbursable loans, direct donations, and development aid).

Parliamentary elections and government cooperation

The parliamentary majorities in Chisinau and Bucharest carry out a substantial role in the period 2016-2019 when the Moldovan-Romanian governmental connection was determined by the complex relationship between the Social Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Moldova.

Although during this distinct period the political dialogue and bilateral cooperation were deepened, the most fundamental problem was the tiny progress made by Moldova in terms of reforms and the considerable degree of corruption in the country. The significant relationship between the social-democratic leaders in Romania and Vlad Plahotniuc made Romania, a member country of the European Union, no longer as demanding with Moldova, pretending not to regard the slippage in the public system.

The Republic of Moldova and Romania have mutually agreed to act to interconnect infrastructures and integrate them into European networks, with pro-European governments in Moldova acting pragmatically to implement legislative measures to ensure a definitive European path.

During all this key period, practically, Moldova was the net beneficiary of the association with the European community, despite the pressures exerted by the Russian Federation on the political decision-makers in Chisinau.

The European aid, doubled by the prominent one from Romania, brought numerous benefits to the citizens of Moldova, the bilateral cooperation knowing the most towering peaks.

After the political condition in Chisinau degenerated, the Romanian authorities were extremely concerned about the situation of democracy in Moldova due to the annulment of the mayoral mandate won by Andrei Năstase.

ACUM-PSRM parliamentary majority and the relations with Romania

The centre-right forces made a compromise immediately after the general election, accepting the formation of a fragile majority with the Socialists. This alliance aimed to remove the corrupt governance of the Democratic Party and intensify political and structural reforms. The appointment of Maya Sandu as Prime Minister gave Romania hope that the Republic of Moldova will become a reliable partner for the EU again

and that the strategic objectives of the bilateral dialogue can be achieved, especially since Ms Sandu's visit to Bucharest reopened the dialogue between Bucharest and Chisinau.

However, the dismissal of the Sandu government and its replacement by a puppet cabinet led by the interests of PDM-PSRM has created a rift in bilateral cooperation².

For example, the program of non-reimbursable loans offered by Romania for development projects has entered into lethargy, because the Chicu Government considers the conditionalities imposed by Romania and the European Union as an attack on Moldova's sovereignty³.

The cooperation between the governments of the two states is not limited to the historically friendly relationship, the dialogue between Bucharest and Chisinau being one that comes down to helping to fight the COVID-19 pandemic⁴, completing the Iasi-Ungheni gas pipeline⁵ and supporting the modernization of school and health infrastructure⁶.

This was reconfirmed by the Romanian authorities, following a bilateral meeting between officials of the two governments⁷. However, full support for Moldova remains conditional on continued reforms essential to the democratic development of the Republic of Moldova.

Foreign policy perspectives and the 2020 presidential election

The alignment of Moldovan legislation and political practices to international standards, but also the adoption of part of European legislation was done at the level of hierarchical governance, which disturbed the circles of power in Moscow, practically feeling a threat from the West.

The re-election of Igor Dodon as President of Moldova is a threat to the European course of the Republic, especially since recently Dodon has intensified its attack on Moldovan law institutions.

A second term as president for Dodon and a possible victory of the Socialists in the other rounds of elections would make difficult the dialogue between Romania and Moldova, especially since Dodon's anti-Romanianism is known.

The biggest problem of bilateral relations is that the two states fail to coordinate their position on the political, social, and economic future of Moldova. The President of Moldova publicly exposed his pro-Russian position throughout his term, bringing Moldova closer to the CIS community through President Dodon, which creates ambivalence in the external position of the Republic: association with the EU and CIS observer.

Following the European course of the Republic of Moldova, since joining the Eastern Partnership and signing the Association Agreement with the European Union, we can see that in Chisinau a certain loyalty to the European community was formed, contrary to the popular will expressed by vote.

With a President who is stubborn enough to break Moldova from European partners and make relations with Western partners difficult, Moldova seems doomed to continue to play a zero-sum game, all to the detriment of its citizens.

² Romanian MFA, "Press release", 2019, <https://www.mae.ro/node/51017>

³ Ibidem

⁴ Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs, <https://www.mai.gov.ro/sprijin-acordat-republicii-moldova-in-lupta-impotriva-covid-19/>

⁵ Transgaz, <https://www.transgaz.ro/sites/default/files/Comunicat%2015.01.2020.pdf>

⁶ Romanian Embassy in Chisinau, <https://chisinau.mae.ro/node/777>

⁷ Romanian MFA, <http://mae.ro/node/53402>

At the risk of isolating itself, Moldova does not have many options for its foreign policy prospects, as Russia seems too threatening for Moldova's statehood, while European integration seems like a good dream in the context of the inability of the political class to resolve the Transnistrian issue. to give coherence to the governmental act.

II. The bilateral dialogue between Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. What role for a balanced foreign policy?⁸

In the contemporary period, the political phenomena in the international arena have managed to become so interdependent that states try to build predictions about the domestic policy of neighboring states and those in the region. Moreover, countries seek to influence the political course of neighboring states through both soft methods such as cultural co-optation, the provision of favorable economic measures, and the application of harsh measures such as blackmail or armed attack. Given the recent developments in bilateral relations between Moscow and Kyiv, the Ukrainian state is becoming increasingly affected by the conduct of the domestic policy of its neighbors. Considering the existence of a frozen conflict zone with a strong Russian presence, but also the presence at the head of the state of a president with deep affinities to the Russian Federation, in this sense the processes in the Republic of Moldova show a special interest for Ukraine.

Therefore, within the Ukrainian academic circles, various possible scenarios were stated after the Moldovan parliamentary elections of February 24, 2019:

1) One of the scenarios submitted referred to the inability to create a governing coalition, a scenario in which no political party manages to get enough votes to hold a majority, and at the same time, the parties will not be able to reach a compromise to form a coalition.⁹ However, the Ukrainian side perceived such an outcome as unlikely. As a result, this doubtful prediction did not materialize.

2) The victory of the Socialists and the formation of a majority government composed only of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM). Several factors could catalyze such a scenario, including the low support enjoyed by Vlad Plahotniuc, the questionable legitimacy of the government, but also the accusation of capturing state institutions, especially judicial ones by the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM) ¹⁰. In other words, the anti-rating of the only ruling Democratic Party favored the incumbent president Igor Dodon, but also the PSRM. In the end, this scenario did not materialize either.

3) All against the DPM. A coalition that included the PSRM and another political party, excluding the DPM. In this scenario, the Ukrainian side also analyzed the coalition with the extra-parliamentary parties at that stage, mentioning in the first instance the main political forces outside the legislature such as the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (DTPP) and the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS). Following several statements made by the PAS leader, the Ukrainian side looked with scepticism at the possibility of the PAS coalition with

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⁹ Hennadiy Maksak și Sergiy Gerasymchuk, "Results of the Moldovan Parliamentary Election 2018: Effects on Development of the Political Situation and Foreign Policy," în *Elections 2019 in Moldova: New Challenges and New Opportunities For Cooperation Within Ukraine-Moldova-Romania Triangle*, Civic Sinergy Policy Paper (2019), 72.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

PSRM. In several interviews, Maia Sandu stated that: *“Democratic Party is the pit of this country, as is PSRM,”*¹¹ or *“there are too many divergences in the programs of the two political parties.”*¹² However, Andrei Năstase, the DTPP leader, was perceived by the Ukrainians as a political force that could form a coalition with the PSRM. The Dignity and Truth Platform Party could participate in a situational coalition with PSRM taking into account the fact that it has also participated in protests and demonstrations with other pro-Russian parties, such as Our Party led by Renato Usatîi. Andrei Năstase motivated his previous movements by the need to use every opportunity to defeat the DPM, thus perceiving as favorable the ad-hoc coalitions to fight an eminent bigger evil.

In the case of this scenario, the PSRM will put itself in a good light on the international arena by demonstrating that it is trying to avoid the polarization of society and it can enter into a dialogue with former opponents. Kyiv wants to perceive Chişinău as an ally, but within such a hybrid coalition, the Republic of Moldova will not be able to be treated as a full ally, as the PSRM will promote a set of decisions in the interests of the Russian Federation.¹³ In an interview for Radio Free Europe Ukraine, the former president Petro Poroshenko stated the conditions under which a possible meeting between the head of the Ukrainian state and the one from the Republic of Moldova is possible. The Ukrainian president said: *“The head of the Moldovan state is very familiar with the position of President Poroshenko, the official position of Kyiv in supporting the integrity of our state [Ukraine], including Crimea. We also expect a firm position from our colleagues.”*¹⁴

One year before the elections for the legislature of the Republic of Moldova, President Poroshenko was already expressing concern about the interference of a third state in this voting. Specifically, he stated that: *“For Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, 2019 is a very important year - there are fundamental elections for the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and there are presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine. And, unfortunately, Russia has begun to implement the scenario of direct interference in electoral processes.”*¹⁵

Therefore, following the political crisis related to the inability to form a governing coalition for 3 months, on June 8, 2019, just before the expiration of the legal term when a parliamentary majority could be formed, PSRM deputies and those from the Bloc ACUM (DTPP + PAS) signed a temporary agreement by which Maia Sandu is appointed prime minister and Zinaida Greceanii, speaker of parliament. Due to fears about the possibility of imposing a settlement model in Moldova according to the Russian scenario, during the crisis Ukraine took a narrow position, without openly supporting any side of the conflict. Moldovan political forces, namely Igor Dodon, Maia Sandu, and Andrei Năstase, rallied against the DPM, but especially its leader, oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc. These changes have shaped a new reality for both the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Artiom Filipenko, director of the department of the Danube-Black Sea region at the National Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Ukraine, considers that: *“The political experience of Igor Dodon will strengthen his position both internally and externally and Moldova could change its foreign policy vector. The*

¹¹ Adevărul, "Maia Sandu exclude posibilitatea unei coaliții postelectorale cu PDM: „Nu avem ce discuta cu hoții și criminalii,” accessed 03.08.2020, https://adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/maia-sandu-exclude-posibilitatea-coalitii-postelectorale-pdm-nu-discuta-hotii-criminalii-1_5bda32ebdf52022f750ca429/index.html.

¹² Radio Europa Liberă Moldova, "Maia Sandu: „Cât regimul va controla țara, nimic bun nu se poate întâmpla pentru cetățenii ei,” accessed 03.08.2020, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/maia-sandu-cât-regimul-va-controla-țara-nimic-bun-nu-se-poate-întâmpla-pentru-cetățenii-ei-/29916404.html>.

¹³ Hennadiy Maksak și Sergiy Gerasymchuk, "Results of the Moldovan Parliamentary Election 2018: Effects on Development of the Political Situation and Foreign Policy," în *Elections 2019 in Moldova: New Challenges and New Opportunities For Cooperation Within Ukraine-Moldova-Romania Triangle*, Civic Sinergy Policy Paper (2019), 70.

¹⁴ РадіоСвобода, "Умовою діалогу з Додоном є підтримка цілісності України, включно з Кримом – Порошенко," accessed 03.08.2020, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-poroshenko-dodon/29458326.html>.

¹⁵ УКРИНФОРМ, „РФ уже начала вмешиваться в избирательные процессы в Украине и Молдове — Порошенко,” accessed 03.08.2020, <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-elections/2610039-rf-uzhe-nacala-vmesivatsa-v-izbiratelnye-processy-v-ukraine-i-moldove-poroshenko.html>.

preeminence of pro-Russian forces creates additional conditions for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict according to the Russian model. At the same time, the progress of relations with the European Union is stagnant and conditions are created to hinder the cooperation of the Republic of Moldova with NATO. And the most important aspect is that this model can become universal for the resolution of conflicts in the post-Soviet space, in the first instance in Ukraine.”¹⁶

Subsequently, on July 9, 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine comes with a declaration regarding the political situation in Chişinău stating that: *“It is important for the country and for the security situation in the region to prevent interference aimed at implementing the Russian scenario of federalization of the country.”¹⁷* A day later, a message was posted on the social network Facebook by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavel Klimkin, in which he emphasized the following: *“We all need a democratic European Moldova, and the prospect of a new Russian bridgehead, which will pose a threat to southern Ukraine, is not at all appropriate.”¹⁸*

On July 12, the Special Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Victor Kryzhanovsky, met with representatives of the new power in the Republic of Moldova. However, this meeting was little publicized and was not reflected on the websites of the embassies of the two states. Also, on September 11-12, the same Victor Kryzhanovsky visited the Republic of Moldova and organized a series of working meetings in Chişinău and Tiraspol. During the meetings with Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Vasile Şova and Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Tatiana Molchan he addressed the issue of removing ammunition from depots in Kolbasna village and the need to address security issues and political issues related to the settlement. The Ukrainian diplomat visited the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova and met with its leader Vadim Krasnoselsky and political representative Vitaly Ignatiev. He assured them that the new government of Ukraine is interested in continuing a constructive dialogue on issues of Transnistrian settlement and achieving tangible results on current issues.¹⁹

Just one month after the appointment, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, has a working visit to Ukraine, during which she met with the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and with the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Volodymyr Groisman. According to the Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova, the officials of the two states: *“confirmed mutual support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, noted that both countries remain not only neighbors but also constant and reliable partners that hold same positions on security protection in the region.”²⁰* However, President Igor Dodon, for a year since Volodymyr Zelenskyy won the presidential election, did not meet with his counterpart and did not receive an invitation for it. On September 9, 2019, another member of the Sandu government, namely the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Nicu Popescu, performs a working visit to Kyiv, at the invitation of his Ukrainian counterpart, Vadym Prystaiko. Discussions focused on the bilateral agenda, regional and international cooperation, European integration, and other topics of common interest.²¹

¹⁶ Artem Fylypenko, “Parliamentary Elections-2019 And Postelection Crisis in Moldova: Challenges And Perspectives For Ukraine,” in *UA: Ukraine Analytica* Issue 3 (17)(2019), 43-44.

¹⁷Українські Національні Новини, “МІА: Україна обеспокоєна поспробою реалізації російського сценарія федералізації Молдови,” accessed 03.08.2020, <https://www.unn.com.ua/ru/news/1805969-mzs-ukrayina-zanepokoyena-sproboyu-realizatsiyi-rosiyskogo-stsenariyu-federalizatsiyi-moldovi>.

¹⁸ Українська правда, “Клімкін: Перспектива російського плацдарма в Молдові створює загрозу для юга України,” accessed 03.08.2020, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2019/06/10/7217713/>.

¹⁹ The Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova, “Спецпредставитель Украины Виктор Кръжановский осуществил визит в Молдову,” accessed 03.08.2020, <https://moldova.mfa.gov.ua/ru/news/74736-specpredstavnik-ukrajini-viktor-krizhanivskij-zdijsniv-vizit-u-moldovu>.

²⁰ The Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova, “Премьер-министр Молдовы Майя Санду посетила Украину,” accessed 03.08.2020, <https://moldova.mfa.gov.ua/ru/news/73817-premier-ministr-moldovi-majja-sandu-vidvidala-ukrajinu>.

²¹ Radio Chişinău, “Nicu Popescu efectuează astăzi o vizită de lucru la Kiev,” accessed 03.08.2020, <https://radiochisinau.md/nicu-popescu-efectueaza-astazi-o-vizita-de-lucru-la-kiev---94451.html>.

Another scenario identified by Ukrainians concerning the parliamentary elections in February 2019 is represented in the following formula:

4) PSRM (Igor Dodon) + DPM (Vladimir Plahotniuc). The Ukrainian side perceived this scenario as very probable, taking into account the mixed electoral system that facilitated the victory for the two parties. There is an ideological approach. Remarkably, both parties are members of the Socialist International, while also having experience of voting together ad-hoc.²²

Ukrainian experts deciphered a series of negative effects coming from a PSRM + DPM coalition and also expressed fears about Chisinau's work in the Georgia-Moldova-Ukraine Interparliamentary Assembly. The scenario according to which the project for joint monitoring of borders by Chisinau and Kyiv along the Transnistrian section is likely to be suspended was also analyzed. Of major importance is the antagonism between President Dodon and his Ukrainian counterpart Poroshenko.

Therefore, that scenario identified by the Ukrainian experts was realized, its materialization being possible following the censure motion submitted to the Sandu government on November 12, 2019. The majority of votes were ensured by the former coalition partner PSRM together with DPM, cumulating 63 votes. Under these conditions, on November 14, the government proposed by Ion Chicu and appointed by President Dodon receives a vote of confidence in parliament. The new cabinet enjoyed the support of 62 deputies from PSRM and DPM, the same political parties that two days ago voted to dismiss the former government.

Consequently, following the previously reported facts, we can conclude that Ukraine is alarmed regarding the existence and preeminence of pro-Russian forces in the Republic of Moldova. Kyiv does not want a Russian stronghold on its border, which can have implications for territorial and energy security.

However, the new prime minister managed to get a one-on-one meeting with the prime minister of Ukraine, but this was not primarily aimed at a discussion between the Moldovan and Ukrainian sides. The meeting took place in a broader context, namely in the circumstance of the plenary meeting of the Heads of Government of the GUAM Member States.

Against the background of the upcoming presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova, another worrying event for Kyiv is the recent meeting between the head of state, Dodon, and the separatist leader in Tiraspol. The conference took place at the residence in Condița, where besides Igor Dodon also participated representatives of the Ministry of Integration, the Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, the Presidential Administration, the National Bank, as well as advisers in economic and reintegration issues. The Transnistrian delegation, in addition to the so-called president, included, in particular, representatives of the so-called presidential administration, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Republican Bank.

Since the previous presidential election and until now Igor Dodon has managed to organize seven meetings with Krasnoselsky. Moreover, how the head of the separatist administration was presented by Dodon aroused dissatisfaction in civil society and other parties in the political arena. Igor Dodon introduced Krasnoselsky as "the president of Transnistria." The invitations and formal discussions that the two camps have systematically define the situation in which Chișinău legitimizes the separatist entity and recognizes the unconstitutional authorities in Tiraspol.

According to Igor Fedyk, Head of the South-Eastern Europe Section at the Center for Studies in the Army, Conversion, and Disarmament: *"Current relations between Chisinau and Moscow-controlled Tiraspol are exactly what the Kremlin wants to see from Kyiv and Donetsk with Lubansk. In other words, relations between Chisinau and Tiraspol*

²² Hennadiy Maksak și Sergiy Gerasymchuk, "Results of the Moldovan Parliamentary Election 2018: Effects on Development of the Political Situation and Foreign Policy," în *Elections 2019 in Moldova: New Challenges and New Opportunities For Cooperation Within Ukraine-Moldova-Romania Triangle*, Civic Sinergy Policy Paper (2019), 62.

are a clear example of how the Ukrainian authorities should not build relations with Russian puppets in Donbas. It is enough to monitor closely what the authorities of the neighboring state are doing and not to repeat its mistakes." ²³

Through these meetings, President Dodon pursues an electoral profit, being aware of how Transnistrian votes can influence the election results, emblematic becoming the case from the 2019 parliamentary elections in which socialist candidates backed by the president confidently won the constituencies created for the population of Transnistria.

Subsequently, on August 4, Igor Dodon went on a working visit to the Russian Federation. The head of state announced on his official Facebook page that: "I am undertaking a short working visit to Moscow where I intend to meet with Russian officials to discuss issues related to the intensification and deepening of Moldovan-Russian cooperation in all areas of common interest." ²⁴ At the same time, the President states: "I had a productive meeting with Dmitry Kozak, Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for the development of trade and economic relations with the Republic of Moldova. We discussed with the Russian side the issue of granting authorizations for the transit of Moldovan goods on Ukrainian territory for export to Russia. The relevant bodies have been instructed to resolve this issue as soon as possible, on mutually advantageous terms." ²⁵ This visit generated a wave of dissatisfaction within the society, being categorized as a pre-election movement. Important is also the fact that this trip took place just one week after the meeting with Krasnoselsky. The mayor of Bălți, Renato Usatîi, came with a comment in this regard stating that: "In Moscow, he [Igor Dodon] intends to convince some of his curators about his supposed and indispensable victory in the elections and the need for support from Moscow." ²⁶

In parallel, on August 4, a member of the Chicu government, namely Oleg Țulea, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova had a working visit to Kyiv where he participated in several meetings with his counterpart Dmytro Kuleba and Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for the Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, Oleksii Reznikov. Officials addressed issues such as counteracting the effects caused by the pandemic, the need to strengthen political relations, but also to intensify cooperation in the trade and economic field. During the discussion between the head of Moldovan and Ukrainian diplomacy, "a distinct topic of dialogue focused on the evolutions of the Transnistrian settlement process, reiterating the commitment to make the necessary efforts to reach a lasting agreement, within the 5 + 2 negotiation format." ²⁷

Also, Oleg Țulea and Oleksii Reznikov discussed: "the efforts made during the negotiation process in the 5 + 2 format, on identifying a viable, peaceful and sustainable solution for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, based on the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity with the provision of special status to the region. The two dignitaries also agreed to organize a visit by Deputy Prime Minister Oleksii Reznikov to Chisinau, to continue the Moldovan-Ukrainian dialogue on

²³ Igor Fedyk, "Молдова: Додон шукає спорятунку Придністров'ї," *Центр досліджень армії, конверсії та роззброєння*, accessed 03.08.2020,

<https://cacds.org.ua/?p=9512&fbclid=IwAR2HiASy0GaD1pib9TEmhc67x9wpcUbdDhRqzMDtEDDX7jQahhQecWauu0k>

²⁴ The Official Facebook Account of the President of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon, accessed 09.08.2020, <https://www.facebook.com/dodon.igor/posts/4792758944083406>.

²⁵ The Official Facebook Account of the President of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon, accessed 09.08.2020, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=4792756374083663&set=a.616038568422152>.

²⁶ The official Facebook account of the president of Our Political Party Renato Usatîi, accessed 09.08.2020, <https://www.facebook.com/RU1.md/posts/3128237493895909>.

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, "Relațiile dintre Republica Moldova și Ucraina, pe agenda vizitei Ministrului Afacerilor Externe și Integrării Europene, Oleg Țulea, la Kiev," accessed 09.08.2020, <https://mfa.gov.md/ro/content/relatiile-dintre-republica-moldova-si-ucraina-pe-agenda-vizitei-ministrului-afacerilor>.

national and regional security issues but also on his position as co-chair of the Moldovan-Ukrainian Joint Cooperation Commission for trade and economic. ²⁸

Therefore, we can conclude that in Ukrainian both academic and political space there is a wave of unrest regarding how politics in Chişinău can evolve. Specifically, Ukrainians will not favor a candidate or party with affinities to the Russian Federation. The rise to power of pro-Russian forces could have negative implications for Ukraine's security and territorial integrity, given Russia's military presence in the frozen conflict zone on the left bank of the Dniester. Over the last few years, Kyiv has tried a pro-Western orientation and a rapprochement with the mechanisms and institutions of the European Union. In this context, authorities from Kyiv implicitly supported the cooperation of the Republic of Moldova with the European international forums, while also showing its support for the pro-European forces in Chişinău. In other words, the Ukrainian side will not support Igor Dodon's candidacy in the next presidential election, as his pro-Russian orientation is well known. During his term in office, the head of state of the Republic of Moldova did not hold any bilateral meetings with his Ukrainian counterpart, Petro Poroshenko, or the newly appointed Volodymyr Zelenskyy. However, Dodon's first official visit as president was to Moscow, just a month after taking office.

III. Themes for reflection for Romania and Ukraine²⁹

After consulting the content of the policy paper developed by the authors of this document with experts from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, several common topics of interest were identified. These are also subjects for reflection for the coming months - a period in which the election campaign for the presidential elections, scheduled for November 1, 2020, will take place. The thematic areas considered important by the experts participating in the debate of August 18, 2020, refer both to the election campaign and the evolution of the content of bilateral dialogues among Bucharest and Chisinau or between Kyiv and Chisinau. Both partners of the Republic of Moldova maintain certain expectations from the future president to be able to promote certain initiatives or projects. The qualified experts and key decision-makers must reflect on the election campaign efficiently. Only in this way, both Romania and Ukraine will be able to correctly formulate objectives and define national interests regarding the Republic of Moldova.

In the following, we intend to bring to your attention the most important theses reported by the participants in the trilateral debate of August 18, 2020. These theses or topics were developed by experts of the Association of Experts for Security and Global Affairs, to extend the debate for those interested in the evolution of political life in Chisinau.

- The relationship with Moscow of the main political actors participating in the presidential elections: What are the messages they intend to promote after interacting with Moscow officials?

This is a sensitive issue for many voters in the Republic of Moldova, but also partner countries. Ukrainian experts believe there will be no major changes in the narratives promoted by the main candidates in the presidential election, at least not for those who have already announced their intention to participate in

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, "Întrevederea cu viceprim-ministrul, ministrul pentru reintegrarea teritoriilor temporar ocupate ale Ucrainei," accessed 09.08.2020, <https://mfa.gov.md/ro/content/intrevederea-cu-viceprim-ministrul-ministrul-pentru-reintegrarea-teritoriilor-temporar>.

²⁹ Angela Grămadă, Ph.D, president of the Experts for Security and Global Affairs Association.

this election campaign. No fundamental changes are also expected in the behavior of the incumbent president, who is constantly consulting his political agenda with Moscow, including on the definition of national interests. The Ukrainian side also constantly monitors and appreciates the dialogue between Igor Dodon and Vadim Krasnoselski. The elements they draw attention to are the federalization of the Republic of Moldova, the vote of the inhabitants of Transnistria, and the content of the electoral exchange between Chisinau and Tiraspol with the assistance of Moscow between electoral processes.

Unlike colleagues in Ukraine, experts from the Republic of Moldova claim that one of Moscow's options may be to maintain the status quo, without extreme interventions during the election campaign. This is primarily due to the "constant investment" in political life in Chisinau, the discursive and sustained feeding of the investments they promoted to manage not only the decision-making act but also the illegal financial resources, the management of false debates about federalization plans or those similar to the promotion of the Novorusia project. The current situation, the preservation of these elements that provide control, shows the limits of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova with European partners or the limits of the country's reunification policy and allows unlimited action for Russia in the Republic of Moldova. Economic dependence is high enough to maintain Russian influence. The evolution of the electoral campaign, the intensive monitoring of the behavior of certain actors, but also the Moscow leadership, will allow testing this hypothesis between September and October 2020.

- How stable or how "calm" is the situation in the Republic of Moldova before elections?

Experts are trying identifying potential challenges. This question is legitimate, if we take into account the current regional circumstances, the protests in Belarus or the internal context, the one in which the economic crisis is intensifying (restrictions imposed on economic agents during the spread of COVID-19 and worsening agricultural problems due to drought from the summer of 2020). The second question in this context concerns the resources available to combat or, at the very least, to control a certain level of protest of citizens dissatisfied with the current government. Both the experts from the Republic of Moldova and those from Ukraine appreciate the de facto situation as calm and without great protest potential among the citizens, which means that they do not see a Belarusian scenario in Moldova as possible. Also, experts are trying to think of post-election scenarios, in which there is a change of leadership, meaning the head of state will be another person, not Igor Dodon. In this context, it is important to analyze the influence that the next president of the country can have on other institutions, like the parliament, where most mandates are currently managed by the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova.

- What is the place and role of ethnic minority communities in the electoral platforms of candidates?

The debate is not recent for the Republic of Moldova or its partners. Most political actors address ethnic minorities and formulate separate messages for their representatives. However, it must be taken into account that some political actors intentionally emphasize the belonging of ethnic minorities to a certain cultural or political space, highlighting a potential contribution to the "common good." The voter only evaluates the form of the promise, without taking into account what is contained in it and what endure the potential consequences.

Several elements must be taken into account when studying the voter-candidate relationship in the Republic of Moldova: Gagauzians, Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, Roma, etc. If for Romania the interest to follow the electoral elections also results from the considerable number of Romanian citizens living across the Prut River, then for Ukraine the recent approach refers to two elements:

1. What security challenges can arise from the Republic of Moldova?
2. How should the relationship with the Ukrainian ethnic community in Moldova be addressed?

If in the case of the first element attention is paid to the challenges coming from the Transnistrian region, but also Gagauzia (the laws promoted by Igor Dodon on Gagauzia and the special status for Taraclia), then in the case of the second element, Ukrainian experts claim that the blame must be accepted and shared between a) political actors in Kyiv, who have not developed policies to address the diaspora, thus becoming a captive of Russian narratives; b) political actors in Chisinau, who promoted these ethnic minorities as belonging to the Russian civilization. Such an approach is less expensive in terms of resources. Regarding Romania's position, it should be mentioned here that Bucharest has only in recent years addressed and even promoted projects dedicated to ethnic minority communities in the Republic of Moldova, ie it has formulated inclusive objectives (Center for the Study of the Romanian Language in Comrat) and interacted with local official authorities in localities where ethnic minorities live. In the long run, such an approach confers more benefits and produces changes in behavior, because the image of a country is no longer associated with messages sent vertically, but with socio-economic initiatives, which contribute to qualitative changes in living standards.

- What is the role of political actors such as Renato Usatii and Ilan Shor in the election campaign?

In this case, not only their option to run for the presidency of the country is considered, but also the support they can offer to candidates with real chances to reach the second round of elections. Will they contribute to the dilution of electoral support for the right or left-wing candidate or will they refrain from political actions? In this sense, the behavior of these actors must be carefully monitored to build a strategy capable of minimizing their impact. There are already presumptions in the public space in which Ilan Shor is assigned the role of tacit supporter of the electoral campaign of the candidate still undeclared at this moment, Igor Dodon. The Ilan Shor's colleagues are no longer so strict in terms of the criticisms they bring to the incumbent president. The goal in this regard could be the sentence in the case of the fugitive politician, Ilan Shor. On the other hand, the relationship between Renato Usatii and Igor Dodon before elections can be appreciated as complicated. In this particular case, the contribution of Moscow is obvious. Other candidates like Mark Tkaciuk or Vladimir Voronin have little chance of influencing the outcome of the presidential election, although the latter one is trying convincing a part of the electorate that it is not just a major left-wing opponent. Voronin considers himself to be Igor Dodon's main opponent in the Republic of Moldova. As might be expected, polls, as well as the results of the last elections, show that the former president no longer has the force to influence the end of this democratic exercise.

- How can investments in the Republic of Moldova be capitalized?

What represents the potential for the development of bilateral or trilateral dialogues? Can Romania and Ukraine assume a much more responsible role in the region, including the formulation of common priorities to help solve the security problems of the neighboring state? It is primarily about the strategy of communicating the interests of Romania and Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova. As for Ukraine, things seem clear enough: there are problems of interaction at the highest level between the two states, which equally refers to discussions on national security issues or sovereignty. These problems are generated by the particular positions of the President-in-Office in the Republic of Moldova. President Igor Dodon's congratulatory message to his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is confusing. It is the first time when Igor Dodon formulates notices that refer so clearly to the "position of the Republic of Moldova on

supporting the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine," even if in 2019 Kyiv was honored with a similar message from the leader of in Chisinau.

For strategic communication, the Bucharest authorities must objectively and directly assess the impact of political, economic, social, cultural investments in the Republic of Moldova. The evaluation must be correct, to eliminate potential benefits for certain political actors in Bucharest or Chisinau. Such an approach is not only necessary but also useful in defining Romania's foreign policy interests and objectives as a coherent actor in the region. It is the approach we insist on in our relationship with the Republic of Moldova: coherence and responsibility. This responsibility assumes multiple dimensions: Romania remains the state that has assumed more extensive support for the European course of the Republic of Moldova; is the country on the border of the European Union and must promote the interest of its citizens, regardless of their residence.

Conclusions

In this policy paper, the authors pointed out different perspectives on approaching the foreign policy narratives formulated by the government in Chisinau in different periods, not only in the last four years. Ukraine's position changed radically after the events of 2014, the authorities in this country becoming much more cautious, more careful, and more moderate in terms of monitoring political processes in the Republic of Moldova. It can also be seen after the annexation of Crimea and the onset of military aggression in eastern Ukraine that the country's authorities encouraged the internationalization of the conflicts in the former Soviet Union, advocating for a common approach in various international fora. The message was always unsupported by states such as the Republic of Moldova, even though there were several joint legislative initiatives between Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in this regard. Besides, both Ukraine and Romania have relied on certain political figures or businessmen to solve bilateral problems. This has undermined the official bilateral relationship, and that because national foreign policy importance has often been associated with business people, not with state interests. All three countries must act in the sense of the correct and objective delimitation of national interests from patrimonial ones.

The presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova will be much more closely monitored by experts in the region and due to the current context, which is influenced by events in Belarus. Some predict certain Belarusian-inspired elements and behaviors in certain candidates from the Republic of Moldova, who did not hide their affinities for the political regime promoted by Alexandr Lukashenko. An analysis that addresses the comparative relevances of the three neighboring states allows the identification of more topics of interest than could have been highlighted in a bilateral format. The trilateral format provides more room for consistent and extensive debate, and the recommendations that can be made within these platforms will be useful to decision-makers who are looking for new solutions to more previous problems.



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