

Foreign Policy Synthesis and Debates

Biweekly Bulletin, Nr. 54, from 28.08.2011

Republic of Moldova's Diplomacy after 20 Years: Achievements and Failures

**Transcript of a radio broadcast, from August 28th 2011, produced by the Foreign Policy Association (APE) in collaboration with Imedia News and Analysis Agency and with the assistance of the German Foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). The broadcast is aired on Radio Vocea Basarabiei every Sunday.*

The main topics of the show:

- 1. The greatest achievements of the Moldovan diplomacy acquired during two decades of independence*
- 2. Challenges to the independence, sovereignty, integrity, stability, prosperity and democracy of the R. Moldova*
- 3. Efforts to be made by Chisinau to achieve the objective of political association and economic integration with the EU*

Corneliu RUSNAC, moderator Imedia: *Good day, dear listeners! I am Corneliu Rusnac and I welcome you to a new edition of the broadcast of discussions on topics of foreign policy, produced with the support of the „Foreign Policy Association” and financed by the „Friedrich Ebert” Foundation.*

In today's show we talk about the recent Press Club traditionally organized by APE dedicated this time to 20 years of existence of the Moldovan diplomacy. During this Press Club, **Victor Chirila, executive director of APE** referred to the achievements and failures of Chisinau diplomats. But which are their greatest achievements obtained during the two decades of independence? Victor Chirila:

- 1. The greatest achievements of the Moldovan diplomacy acquired during two decades of independence*

Victor CHIRILĂ, executive director of APE: Among achievements I would like to mention the involvement of the R. Moldova in several regional initiatives that promote the idea of European integration. This involvement was not always easy for the R. Moldova's diplomacy especially when domestic political support was not so well-defined. This was seen in the late 1990s when R. Moldova, the country's diplomacy, strongly and actively promoted, without strong support from politicians, the idea of our country's accession to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. This connection, according to the diplomats of that time, should have detached our country from the former Soviet area, transform R. Moldova in a South Eastern European state and through this initiative we should have opened opportunities for gradual integration in the European Union as the Western Balkan states obtained, states that also have been part of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

The second achievement is the internationalization of the problem regarding illegal deployment of Russian troops and munitions on the territory of the R. Moldova. This internationalization was

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undoubtedly achieved with assistance from our Western partners, with assistance from the European Union, the United States of America and neighboring countries (here I would like to Romania).

Third, withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of the R. Moldova has been codified in international law through decisions taken at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in 1999. Even if the Russian Federation does not comply with those agreements altogether, one thing is undeniable, and this is the fact that the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of the R. Moldova is currently a norm of international law. This is a reality and a success of the R. Moldova's diplomacy.

Four, they managed, again, not always with due support from the political class, the internationalization of the Transnistrian conflict by involving the United States and the European Union. This idea has been formulated since the late 1990s but has been ignored for years by politicians who didn't have the courage to promote it. Finally, after the failure of the Kozak Memorandum, the Communist Party and then President Mr. Voronin understood that internationalization of the Transnistrian conflict is inevitable, the involvement of the United States and the European Union is necessary and this was done during the coming years and, in particular, this was achieved in 2005. Also, I should note here that in the late 1990s the European Union was refractory regarding the Transnistrian issue, didn't want and was not interested in active involvement, in finding a compromise solution. This was seen when R. Moldova joined the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, when big countries have decided to accept R. Moldova in this regional initiative, the European Union formulated two indispensable conditions for R. Moldova: not to raise in the framework of the Stability Pact the Transnistrian conflict issue and not to require prospect of gradual integration within the European Union. Well, in the coming years, mainly due to the European Neighborhood Policy this reality has changed. Transnistrian problem is on the agenda of political dialogue with the European Union, it was included in the Action Plan that R. Moldova signed with the European Union in 2005; the European Union is more and more active in the Transnistrian region be it for political dialogue or for assistance in promoting confidence-building measures between both banks and according to the new vision of the Eastern Partnership it seems that the EU intends to intensify its presence in the Transnistrian region in the coming years and to participate, why not, in a modernization program or post conflict assistance for the Transnistrian region (at least this perspective, this possibility is raised by the European Commission in the new vision of the European Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership which will be discussed at the Eastern Partnership Summit in September in Poland).

Another achievement, I think, is the recognition by the European Union of the R. Moldova's European aspirations. This recognition was made by signing the Action Plan EU - Moldova in 2005. The recognition of these aspirations has been done despite minimal progress in terms of democracy in those years and it was mainly due to R. Moldova's diplomacy. Despite many shortcomings, deficiencies of our diplomats I believe that the Moldovan diplomacy managed, through active dialogue with Brussels, to persuade the European Commission, the European Union to recognize these European aspirations. These aspirations, ultimately, should lead to the recognition of a clear perspective of EU political integration for R. Moldova.

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Six, thanks to the insistence of the Moldovan diplomacy the objective of European integration of the R. Moldova became a strategic objective in both domestic policy and foreign policy. In the late 1990s this idea was strongly promoted by the Moldovan diplomacy. The idea did not have a large support because of political instability at that time in R. Moldova. The diplomacy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the late 1990s developed the first European integration strategy of the R. Moldova, a strategy that was presented to political parties in Parliament and there have been attempts to discuss it. Communist Party refused to support this strategy but after six years the same Communist Party raised the European integration as an issue of main priority of the state R. Moldova. This must be known. The idea of European integration has remained alive in spite of many difficulties in the early 2000s in R. Moldova, remained alive because of the persistence and activeness of the R. Moldova's diplomacy. And, of course, we approach the last two years of our independence, during which there have been undoubted successes due to democratic changes that took place in our country, but also due to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is now administered by the best team of diplomats from the last 20 years. Also, due to the perseverance and ability of our diplomats we manage, eventually, to build on that trust that the European Union has granted us in 2009 that is to finally open the dialogue on visa liberalization regime with the European Union, to start negotiations on political association and economic integration of R. Moldova within European Union. These things I believe are due in large part, and this is recognized in society, to the R. Moldova's diplomacy which was able to take advantage of the European Union's openness, was able to exploit its diplomatic potential in order to promote these objectives through dialogue with EU capitals.

Corneliu RUSNAC: Despite the efforts of the Moldovan diplomacy, said Victor Chirila, major challenges to the independence, sovereignty, integrity, stability, prosperity and democracy of the R. Moldova remain the same as 20 years ago.

2. Challenges to the independence, sovereignty, integrity, stability, prosperity and democracy of the R. Moldova

Victor CHIRILA: First, the first challenge, even though it is largely psychological, but events in Georgia proved that it can become a real threat, is namely the illegal deployment of Russian troops and munitions on the R. Moldova's territory. This deployment has no argument in terms of international law and has no political reasoning. Of course, the Russian Federation managed in 2002 to reconnect, to link the withdrawal of Russian troops with the Transnistrian conflict settlement. This is a failure of our country's that time diplomacy.

Two, the great challenge that is related to the first one, is the fragility of our neutrality status. Basically, the status of permanent neutrality, enshrined in the R. Moldova's Constitution is violated for decades by the Russian Federation. This is a reality, not even the Russian Federation can deny this, especially us who are interested in a close partnership with the Russian Federation, a partnership which would start from a solid ground based on mutual respect.

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Three, Transnistrian separatism which is controlled by an authoritarian, semi-Soviet undemocratic regime, anti-Western regime and as long as these realities are kept Transnistrian region remains a hotbed of instability not only across Europe but for R. Moldova primarily. Any reconnection, any reintegration of the Transnistrian region in R. Moldova must be accompanied by democratization of the region. This democracy cannot happen during a week, a month or even a year. It is a process that must start from now and continue in parallel with a viable political solution to the Transnistrian problem. And here I think the European Union and the United States must engage more actively in promoting democratic change in this region. As long as in Tiraspol we have an authoritarian, undemocratic, anti-Western regime any compromise solution risks not to be implemented on the contrary it may be a solution that would jeopardize the independence, sovereignty, democracy and European integration course of our country. This must be clearly stated by our diplomacy and must be taken into account by our political class. We cannot allow 20 years of democratic transformation to be questioned by a possible compromise solution which is not based on democratization of the Transnistrian region.

Four, I think that an enormous challenge with profound impact on our domestic policy, political cohesion, cohesion of society and the coherence of external policy is energy security and I think in 20 years nothing was done to solve this problem. The crucial role that our western neighbor Romania has in ensuring energy security was continually ignored. Romania is the country that can help us influence the energy balance of R. Moldova. Unfortunately, this thing was constantly ignored by the political class in R. Moldova due to problems of political dialogue between Chisinau and Bucharest; largely artificial meant to divide the society. In order to maintain the power have been ignored concrete projects in energy, transport, infrastructure, projects would have ensured in 20 years a relative stability in the energy sector, a relative energy independence in relations with the Russian Federation. We should not entirely get rid of Russian energy resources, it doesn't have to be our diplomacy's goal, but rebalancing the influence is necessary and this remains a challenge, a goal for our diplomacy and our political class in the future. Of course, in these 20 years, I previously mentioned, R. Moldova was unable to break away from the former Soviet Union in the European regional approaches. Even now European Union, European Union member states consider us as a part of the former Soviet area and link our prospects of European integration, of deepening our relations with the European Union with Ukraine, Belarus and the Caucasus. This, from a certain point of view, is positive because the EU is trying to mobilize us, to mobilize these states to work together, to cooperate as much as possible and to encourage the exchange of experience in reforms, legislative harmonization with the European Union. At the same time, this connection of the R. Moldova with the former Soviet space hinders our country to get a clear perspective of political integration in the EU.

Unfortunately, R. Moldova failed to benefit from the opportunity of the 1990s when Moldova had the possibility to depart from the former Soviet space by joining the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. It had the opportunity to break away not economically because political and economic relations are important but in terms of perceptions of future visions of the region is important for R. Moldova to be connected very well to regional areas which have a perspective of European integration, where the EU is already engaged to provide conceptual perspective of European integration and to accept them as members of the European Union. This was not achieved and it was not achieved mainly because of

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political changes in R. Moldova in the late 1990s and early 2000s and because the reform agenda that was initiated by Ion Sturza Government has not been completed by previous governments and, in particular, governments controlled by the Communist Party. I believe and am convinced that in the early years of the 2000s such a detach and inclusion of the R. Moldova in the so-called Stabilization and Association process of the Western Balkans would have been possible. Then R. Moldova was asked to do consistent, coherent, visible, efforts, to show tangible results in the field of democratic reforms, or it didn't happen. Changing governments in Chisinau and return to power of the Communist Party changed the foreign policy trajectory, instilled our Western partners distrust regarding developments in our country and this had a negative impact on the prospects for deepening our relations with the European Union.

Also, a failure of the R. Moldova, and I already mentioned it somehow, is the fact that our country so far didn't received a clear perspective of political integration in the EU.

Corneliu RUSNAC: However, Victor Chirila stated that in the last two years Moldovan diplomacy showed indisputable progress in deepening the relations with the European Union. After 20 years of independence R. Moldova is on the verge of political association and economic integration with the EU, two very important objectives which once achieved will enable Chisinau to advance towards full integration in the EU. Nonetheless, what needs Chisinau to do in order to achieve these goals?

3. Efforts to be made by Chisinau to achieve the objective of political association and economic integration with the EU

Victor CHIRILA: To achieve these goals for sure practical achievements, concrete domestic accomplishments in the realm of democratic and economic reforms; achievements, reforms that recently beat up on the spot because of political instability, because our political parties, class is divided, not united regardless of color behind a national idea that would be the idea of European integration. In 2005, the political parties had the courage to formulate and support in parliament such a platform, a platform for European integration of R. Moldova. We believe that such a platform must be updated and supported by all parliamentary parties in the current Parliament and be open to receive support from extra-parliamentary parties and the civil society. Such a platform that would unite the political class and civil society and society as a whole is necessary in order to overcome existing differences, to mobilize the energy of the society, of the political class to organize the available resources of the country for a more rapid progress towards European integration. I think such a platform could serve as a base in overcoming the political crisis in our country.

I think R. Moldova's diplomacy should ensure a favorable climate, suitable for internal reforms and this kind of environment requires concrete actions regarding our partnership with the Russian Federation. If we talk about our relations with the Russian Federation I would say that lately, compared to previous years, we have a more consistent dialogue between the Foreign Ministries as well as between the Parliaments. It is important for this trend to continue, deepen and focus on addressing regional security issues that are affecting the stability our country and affect the stability in the region where the Russian

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Federation has major interests. Primarily, I refer to the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict by engaging Russian Federation in finding a compromise solution.

Of course, we must not neglect the deepening of the economic - commercial relations with the Russian Federation. Russian Federation is a key market, major market for our agricultural products and that is why the Russian Federation is a major investor in our economy. These things must be maintained, developed, expanded, but then again, together with the deepening of the sovereignty and integrity of the R. Moldova. Cultural and humanitarian cooperation, including the Russian minority rights in R. Moldova are topics of special interest for the Russian Federation. Some Russian objections are unfounded, others have to be discussed, but the dialogue regarding this matter must be continuously in order to avoid any reinterpretation by certain forces from the Russian Federation and, in general, R. Moldova, which would disrupt the good evolution of our relations with Russia. Joint partnership between R. Moldova and the Russian Federation requires flexibility, intelligence and permanent dialogue regarding common concerns.

Two, we believe it is time to put into practice the European strategic partnership with Romania. There is a declaration signed in April last year at the Presidents level. This partnership must be based on a concrete action plan which should be implemented jointly by the governments in Chisinau and Bucharest. Such a plan is being elaborated at the moment. Hopefully, this plan will be made public, will be discussed and will be implemented. This plan should lead to the development of identity, linguistic, cultural, historical, economic and political ties that exist. We are not welcoming the ignorance of the identity factor in relation to Romania which could disrupt the smooth development and confidence between capitals. This is not to be overlooked, is something that must be recognized and something that should help to strengthen the relations between Chisinau and Bucharest. As long as some parties try to ignore this factor there will be dissatisfaction from a part of society and of course this will be reflected in the approaches of political parties in R. Moldova and will not serve the cohesion of civil society and society of the R. Moldova as a whole.

Third, relations with neighbors and especially with Ukraine are important. Lately there have been successes in solving minor technical problems with certain impact on the political dialogue and economic cooperation. It is important that these small successes lead and formulate a solid platform for cooperation focused on the idea of European cooperation. As long as we are part of the Eastern Partnership and the European Union has a common vision of this region, a partnership between Kiev and Chisinau in terms of European integration is necessary. This doesn't mean that R. Moldova will not be treated differently, on the contrary, if R. Moldova will record remarkable success, higher than the ones recorded by Kiev, certainly the perception and approach of the European Union towards our country will change and the prospect of European integration will be easier to gain and argued in relations with Brussels and other European capitals.

We also believe that the program Partnership for Democracy, because this is the theme of the partnership with the United States, must be deepened and this Partnership for Democracy should focus more on topics such as regional security and the Transnistrian issue, as well as on intensification of the cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance. Whether or not R. Moldova is a neutral state, it must

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demonstrate that it is an actor involved in strengthening regional security, European security. This can be done together with the United States, European Union and neighboring countries. It is important that the Partnership for Democracy include more items, be more visible on the dimensions of European integration and regional security areas. We also believe that this enhancement should be focused on military modernization of the R. Moldova. A sovereign, independent country must have an army that meets European standards, an army that is efficient, well-equipped, an army that could be treated as an element of regional security and not as a regional risk.

Five, we believe that the transformation of Russian peacekeeping contingent in an international civilian mission must be accelerated. This issue must be raised on the agenda of our Western partners; it should always be discussed at the highest level between Moscow and Brussels, Moscow and Washington. R. Moldova, the Moldovan diplomacy must continue on this path. This transformation should not expect the emergence of a political solution for the Transnistrian region. This transformation is necessary because a military contingent, as it is now, cannot help to promote confidence-building measures between both banks. Its mission was quite different. Now realities have changed. We need to reconnect the banks in various fields be it trade, be it economy, infrastructure or local authorities. The military cannot contribute in full measure to such a reconnection, to such a dialogue. We need a European Union civilian mission, together with Ukraine and Russia to mobilize both sides and intensify their contacts. Currently, even if there is an interest in promoting confidence-building measures, the Russian peacekeeping mission is an impediment. This must be said categorically, honestly and should be discussed with the Russian Federation.

Two other priorities of our diplomacy refer to the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from the country and this must be done in accordance with international law and the commitments that the Russian Federation has previously assumed. The last imminent objective, namely resumption of official negotiations, should start as soon as possible. Our diplomacy must insist on this in the dialogue with our partners but also is important that the resumption of negotiations focus on a specific topic. This specific topic should be the negotiation of a special status for Transnistria within R. Moldova, a special status which would strengthen the sovereignty, independence and democracy of the country and ensure European integration of the R. Moldova. Any solution that does not comply with these conditions, more than likely will not be supported by society and will not have any success in ensuring the viability of the R. Moldova.

Our diplomacy faces enormous tasks, tasks that it cannot achieve alone. It needs strong support from political class, while the political class must mobilize in order to finally, after 20 years, find a compromise on key foreign policy issues. The European integration of the Central and South – Eastern European countries was fast because the political classes of these countries have managed to find the necessary compromise on foreign policy issues. Foreign policy didn't divide them, but united them and this saved the countries' energy, the policy classes' energy so that they were dedicated to the goal of achieving the major objectives of their countries' national interests. This should serve as an example for our country, for our politicians who cannot find this compromise, dialogue that could unite them.

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Corneliu RUSNAC: Unfortunately, our show has come to an end. Thank you very much for your presence. Dear listeners, I am Corneliu Rusnac, and remind you that you have listened to a show of synthesis and debates on foreign policy issues, the show is supported by the Foreign Policy Association and financed by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Till next time!