

Foreign Policy Synthesis and Debates

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German Perspective on the Transnistrian Crises and Main Foreign Policy Vectors of the R. Moldova

**Transcript of a radio broadcast, from October 16th 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. Germany's role in settling the transnistrian conflict
2. Return of Vladimir Putin as leader of Kremlin Administration and the change of perspectives regarding transnistrian crisis
3. R. Moldova should strive for Euro – Asian Union or European Union
4. Prospects of obtaining by the R. Moldova a visa liberalization regime with EU

Corneliu RUSNAC, moderator Imedia: Good day, dear listeners! I am Corneliu Rusnac and I welcome you to a new 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 broadcast I would like to present you a discussion with the German independent expert Martin Sieg, which took place in the framework of a Press Club organized by Foreign Policy Association. One of the issues discussed during the Press Club was the transnistrian conflict. Martin Sieg considers that the transnistrian problem doesn't have a quick solution and that its settlement will require more time. Martin Sieg:

1. Germany's role in settling the transnistrian conflict

Martin SIEG: We do not expect that the 5+2 format, any time soon, will come up with the final solution. I personally think it is going to be a long term process. It will require also Moldova, Chisinau and Tiraspol to move closer to each other, solve many problematic issues between themselves so, it is not just for the parties within the 5+2 format to figure out what kind of compromises are possible. What the 5+2 format can achieve in some time is to find some common ground with respect of certain principles which have, of course, to ensure the territorial integrity of Moldova and ensure that the final settlement will end up with some kind of functional state. With the elections coming up in Transnistria, Russia, elections that may come up in Moldova too, I personally think that goal could be achieved optimistically rather in the course of 2012. In any way, the process must be backed by strategies undertaken by Moldova, the EU, to proceed with the European integration of Moldova, domestic reforms in Moldova, political consolidation of Moldova, which is also important for other powers to make up their mind and find their own interest. For as long as Russia, for instance, cannot be sure who is governing in Chisinau in a few months you can hardly expect Russia to take any bigger initiative here. Then I think it is quite

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important to have a strategy of active engagement to Transnistria also undertaken by Moldova together with the EU in order to foster change in Transnistria too.

Corneliu RUSNAC: What is the role of Germany in settling the transnistrian conflict?

Martin SIEG: Germany in this whole process can offer support. Germany is not just acting on its own and will not act over the head of the Moldovan Government, but this whole project is indeed also intended to be supportive to the Government of Moldova. So, in this respect, it is important for Moldova to know very well not only to build common consensus about the red lines Moldova don't want to cross, but also the compromises it is prepared to make.

Corneliu RUSNAC: Martin Sieg underlined that currently Russia is not interested in settling the transnistrian crises. What kind of changes in perspectives could bring the comeback of Vladimir Putin as a leader of Kremlin Administration?

2. Return of Vladimir Putin as leader of Kremlin Administration and the change of perspectives regarding transnistrian crisis

Martin SIEG: I think that Russia has a serious interest in solving the Transnistrian Conflict and we should not overestimate how high Transnistria ranks on the Russian foreign policy agenda, which is actually rather low. I think the major problem for Russia will not be so much about the Russian interests, but about domestic politics in Russia, about strategic culture in Russia. Every Russian leader has to be very careful to agree to any solution which seems that Russia is abandoning Transnistria, for, there are many different opinions in Russia, there are also nationalist forces so, it is very important for Russian leaders not look like somebody who is abandoning compatriots. Therefore, a viable solution requires from any Russian leader much more political determination and political will than one may expect. Here it is important to include the whole Russian leadership so, of course, we have to deal with Medvedev, but you should not calculate that you can make a deal with Medvedev without Putin. I think in any case we need Putin. Putin Presidency, I think, will face many more difficulties in the future than his Presidencies have faced in the past. There is still this very important thing as modernization of Russia. Russia faces many difficulties here and we should not consider Putin less eager to modernize Russia than Medvedev. Also, the Russian society is not simply satisfied with just political stability. Putin has brought himself into a more challenging position. Taking that into consideration, I think two possibilities are there: one is, because of greater domestic problems Russia will try to avoid foreign conflicts, is going towards a more cooperative direction and that could create a more positive environment for a solution; the second possibility is, of course, that because of the domestic problems Putin doesn't want to appear as being weak in foreign policy and that could contribute to the development of a more hard line position. What actually might happen, I don't know. These are the possibilities which I see.

Corneliu RUSNAC: In another context, Mr. Sieg referred to statements made by Communist leader Vladimir Voronin who said recently that R. Moldova's place should be in the Euro – Asian Union. The German expert considers that these statements have a strong electoral nature.

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3. R. Moldova should strive for Euro – Asian Union or European Union

Martin SIEG: There are parts of the electorate, there is media in different languages and people are looking for support so it is not for me to say what Moldovans want. I only remember that when in power, Mr. Voronin strove for European integration also and always pushed the EU to increase their offers to Moldova. Well, it is for Moldova to consider what is more in the benefit of its country: joining the Russian – Belarus customs union or join the European project. I think that the European project is a more comprehensive one and has generally a little bit more to offer, but it is not a game to play of who offers more and gets extension of its zone of influence. I think the most important question should be what integration project better fosters reforms, guarantees for a stable development, attracts foreign investments and ensures that Moldova can expect not only political stability, but also significant economic growth. Here, the EU has a very developed set of rules and the implementation of this set of rules has proved efficient in many European countries, those who did benefit from it. In the end the Eastern Partnership is not the end of the line. Also, although the EU is not prepared to enter into serious discussions about further enlargement now, there is still a European future behind the Eastern Partnership.

Corneliu RUSNAC: A similar point of view had also the executive director of the Foreign Policy Association Victor Chirila:

Victor CHIRILA: I think that statement is aimed at the future electoral campaign which will follow after this endless political instability in R. Moldova. I think that the Communist Party is already preparing for this campaign and will go with this slogan to win nostalgic R. Moldova voters, people who are nostalgic for Soviet times. I also think that Mr. Voronin has once again shown that it is not consistent when it comes to our foreign policy. He always proved to be very skilful in exploiting international and regional situation in order to stay in power and in this case to return to power. No doubt, in the coming years we should have a serious talk on the initiative made by Mr. Voronin in order to come up with arguments and counter - arguments to convince society that European integration is the only way to have economic and democratic reform in the country. We must know very well what we want, how we see this country in the coming years. We want a country that is part of a customs union composed of countries which are fragile economically and democratically, where respect for democratic values is questionable or we want a country where our rights are respected, where freedom of expression is respected, political rights are taken into account by our political class. We must have a clear strategic vision regarding the future of our country and our own. I think such initiatives only unbalance political dialogue in the R. Moldova, doesn't add any stability.

Corneliu RUSNAC: Martin Sieg also spoke about the prospects of obtaining by the R. Moldova a visa liberalization regime with EU. According to him, Chisinau is likely to obtain it in a relatively short period of time, but this regime, at some degree, is prevented by prolonged political crisis in the country.

4. Prospects of obtaining by the R. Moldova a visa liberalization regime with EU

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Martin SIEG: Well there is one obvious problem and that is that Moldova, at this time, lacks political consolidation, instability in the Government is a problem. As in most other democratic countries, leaders are more concerned in competing against each other than by pursuing serious reforms. There is at least one good reason for that, reforms are costly, require political will. Also, European integration will not come as just a gracious gift, no it will require reforms and there will be losers. There will be more winners, but usually losers recognize earlier that they are losers than the winners recognize that they are winners. Therefore, for that political reason it is quite understandable that political leaders first strive to stabilize and strengthen their own positions before moving on with reforms. But, in a more general sense I would say that Moldova is really in a very difficult position. Moldova has many opportunities right now. You have at the leadership of many ministries quite capable leadership and you have a general consensus on what kind of reforms are necessary. Moreover, there is a hope in the EU that Moldova, after things didn't went so well in the Ukraine, will become a success story of European integration in Eastern Europe and because of that there is much attention on Moldova, much good will, but if political instability will prevail this intention will fly away and many people in Europe (EU) will think that they just been reminded of the experience we made with Ukraine. With that, many opportunities will be lost. I think that Moldova without sacrificing any opportunities cannot go one election after another.

Indeed, there is a question we have to ask, if that coalition cannot stick together and really concentrate on reforms well, who can? What is the alternative? That is quite the problem I think. You should never rule out the possibility of surprises, moreover there is a take in Brussels that Moldova is very seriously moving forward in implementing the Action Plan. To be honest, it is not simply what Moldova does. There are two problems that Moldova can hardly really influence itself. First, visa liberalization is not just an automatism which comes with the implementation of the Action Plan. In the end, it will require a political decision which will require in the EU just the qualified majority among schengen states. I think attitude in the EU are changing and, therefore, it can take a bit of time to convince everybody that visa liberalization is a necessity. This political process cannot be influenced by the Moldovan Government. The second problem is about technicalities. The Action Plan has laid out a clear framework of procedures. Things have to be implemented, there will be an evaluation, then there will be a report and a decision and then we will move on to the next phase. That will take time and 2012 is ambitious in this respect too. I personally think that visa liberalization will come, it's a necessity. I think that the Moldovan Government is doing what it is in its power to push that process, but there is no one in the world that could guarantee that it will happen in 2012 or 2013.

Corneliu RUSNAC: Dear listeners, you listened to some fragments from a discussion with the German independent expert Martin Sieg. 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!

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