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Foreign Policy Synthesis and Debates

THE MAIN TOPICS OF THE SHOW:

- 1. Jennifer Brush**, Chief of the OSCE Mission to the Republic of Moldova about the 5+2 negotiation process and perspectives of Transnistrian conflict settlement
- 2. Relations between Chisinau and Kiev**, a discussion with the Moldova ambassador to Kiev, **Ion Stavila**. Republic of Moldova has great expectations from the Ukrainian OSCE Presidency in 2013.

Jennifer Brush: Settling Transnistrian Conflict a Step towards EU Membership

■ **Lina Grau**: Irish Minister for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton, who is this year the President-in-Office of the Organization for Security

and Cooperation in Europe, recently welcomed in Chisinau the progresses made in settling the Transdnistriean issue during this year, but pointed

out that the OSCE would like more progresses in regulating the situation of schools with teaching in Latin script situated on the left bank of the Nistru River, but also in terms of freedom of movement, in particular the opening of the Gura Bacului Bridge, renovated in the early 2000s with the support of EU funds.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is one of the



mediators in the negotiation format 5 + 2 for the Transnistrian settlement, along with Russia and Ukraine, a format which also has as observers, the European Union and the United States of America. The Chief of the OSCE Mission in Moldova, Jennifer Brush, told us in an interview, that the negotiations on the Transnistrian problem are dynamic, even if, says the Ambassador, permanent settlement of the conflict is not just a matter of a day or two away. I asked Jennifer Brush first to make a few conclusions regarding the meeting that took place in the middle of this month in the 5 + 2 format, the fourth since the restart of the official talks at the end of last year.

■ **Jennifer Brush:** As you know I am a veteran of many conflicts and I am really impressed by the speed of these talks. Many of these subjects that we have been talking about have been going on for much longer in other negotiations and in other parts of the world. Some of the press that I have been seeing talk about how slow these things are going, my impression is just the opposite that we have made remarkable progress in a very short period of time.

In particular the nostrification issue, the mutual recognition of diplomas, is a big issue - recognizing each other institutions of higher education. The fact that we have a decision and demonstrated political will to solve this, so people can use their degrees to live, work and study throughout the region is a huge step forward. Of course, there are going to be details to be worked out, but as long as the political will is there and the two sides have agreed I am convinced that the lives of people in the region will be improved dramatically.

In addition, as you know, there are three baskets of issues. The second basket is what we call humanitarian issues, but the two current topics in that basket consist of setting up a human

rights forum and a civil society/media forum. We accomplished those two things at the last 5+2 round. We now have agreement to set up the human rights working group under the law enforcement group and to include law enforcement officials from the both sides of the river, as well as international human rights experts. We also have agreement to set up a civil society forum where representatives of civil society from both sides of the river, as well as international experts, can meet and talk about issues related to reintegration.

This basket for the so called humanitarian issues are what traditionally have been "track 2" issues. Now they are considered as important as the traditional track one issues consisting of political and security concerns. I am very impressed with the Irish initiative to make these traditional track 2 issues into track 1 issues. In my view, is very important that we are discussing human rights and inclusion of civil society, so that whatever agreement we reach has brought in a number of elements of the society, including, most importantly civil society groups and now we will also have an objective, neutral forum for discussing allegations of human rights abuses. So I think that in terms of a negotiating theory point of view it is very important that we have made these traditionally track 2 issues into track 1 issues, and not only that, we have agreed how to address them.

I have talked about things that we managed to agree on and there are still significant issues that we are still negotiating. We have two working papers now in the process of being reviewed by both sides and by the negotiators, one on education and one on freedom of movement. These are issues that both sides have indicated as high priority and by definition they are also very difficult to resolve. But, we have now papers and I think we are moving closer to finding agreement

on those two issues. For the education paper we are looking for a resolution for the Latin script schools in Transnistria and we have some recommendations about how to resolve that issue. And for the second paper, addressing freedom of movement, we are focusing on the opening of the Gura Bacului Bridge. There is really no technical or financial reason not to open it. So reopening is not a simply technical or financial issue, there is some associated issues that we are looking a closely. Again, we have a working paper and we are hoping to bring the sides together frequently to be able to resolve the outstanding issues. I should add that both sides have agreed for their primary negotiators to meet on a weekly basis from now on.

■ **Lina Grau:** I asked Ambassador Jennifer Brush to give us more details on the Civil Society and Press Forum, about the establishment of which was agreed in Vienna. What would their activity consist of?

■ **Jennifer Brush:** I have to say in the first place this forum is part of the Irish experience and that is why we were so delighted that the Irish introduced this initiative. I am looking forward to working with my Irish colleagues to find out what best practices are from the Irish experience and we hope to take those best practices and implement them here in Moldova.

■ **Lina Grau:** Mrs. Ambassador, you came into office at a time that is considered to be extremely favorable: after six years of stagnation, official negotiations restarted and talks are going quite dynamically. However, discussion on sensitive issues relating directly to the future status of the Transnistrian region didn't take place yet. How do you see the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in medium and long term perspective? Could there be a solution reached soon, or the settlement process will take some time?

■ **Jennifer Brush:** If you ask me to talk about the negotiations near, medium and long term, I can discuss it sequentially. I think that in the near term the largest task we have to accomplish is confidence building. This may seem technical. At the beginning, confidence building really is an essential step in order to create the environment for both sides not only to agree on a solution to a problem, but also to implement the solution and then also demonstrate to the public that implementation of these solutions brings about improvement to their lives.

In the medium term we are going to have to get to some of these more tricky issues, I mentioned two of them, education and the issues associated with the freedom of movement, and we know that these are long standing disagreements and these will be harder to resolve. If you look at our papers I would say that maybe 50% of the substance is agreed, of course the other 50% we didn't agreed to is the most difficult part, so in the medium term we are going to need to be able to come together and finalize the freedom of movement and the education solutions. And then, on our agenda we have a couple of issues in basket three which are security issues that both sides have agreed are high priorities. One of them is law enforcement and the other one is disaster preparedness.

As I have said, both sides have agreed on the priority of addressing security issues, but the Transnistrian side has politicized basket three and is reluctant to talk about basket three; at least they were in this round of negotiations, although they agreed the subject matter was a priority. I have told the Transnistrian side that actually all of the baskets eventually touch on the idea of status. And so, no matter what issue we are talking about, eventually status becomes key to resolving all of these issues. The

entire time we are talking about status, you can't avoid that question. Maybe I should repeat that we all know what the ultimate outcome will be: Moldova with its international recognized borders, territorial integrity and sovereignty intact with a special status for Transnistria. We know that that will be the outcome. What we are going to call it and the details, what it will look like, are something we still need to discuss.

But it is quite clear to me that the way Europe is going, the EU and the Council of Europe is going towards more devolution and decentralization throughout Europe, so it is clear to me that part of the solution will be decentralization of competences throughout Moldova. We know for example that the Council of Europe and the European Union are already talking to Chisinau about decentralization under current legislation and improving that legislation to increase the possibility for more decentralization of basic competencies.

■ **Lina Grau:** I'd like to talk about the issue of changing the status or the format of the peacekeeping troops on the Nistru River. The issue is lively discussed in the society. Chisinau insists that this mission has already fulfilled the task for which it was created and needs to be reformed. That is the OSCE's opinion on this issue?

■ **Jennifer Brush:** My opinion is that we need to solve the conflict and once you solve the conflict there will be no need for peacekeepers, whether they should be given better uniforms or other various technical aspects, how the problem should be addressed, that is up to JCC, that is not under my competency to address right now. But I think the main point is to focus everybody involved in the conflict to settle the conflict and give the peace keepers no further reason to be here.

I don't want to interfere in any way in your internal politics but when you have marches as the Unionist march yesterday, that just adds to the Transdnistrian defense that the reason to keep the peacekeepers is because "Moldova really calls really for unification with Romania," and so those types of events they sort of fit into the justification for keeping the peacekeepers. I was pleased by the Prime Minister's statement and the Mayor's statements about the marches and I was pleased to see top leadership speaking out about these marches and what they mean to others who were observing them.

I don't know how to be more clear; the focus must be on resolving the conflict. I think there is a constant dissonance when we keep on talking about withdrawing the peacekeepers and then we have these unionist marches, and in my mind, coming here as an outsider, it is bit contradictory. I get asked about the unionists by the Russian side all the time and I get asked about comments by Moldovan politicians and it is delivered to me as proof and evidence that Transnistrians still have something to worry about. I don't happen to agree with that point of view, but all I am saying is that there are plenty of statements out there for the Transnistrian and the Russians to confirm their idea, that I don't share, that there is a threat. Sometimes it is difficult for me to be asked that question, "why I don't insist on the withdrawal of the peacekeepers," when I hear unionist rhetoric floating around in this environment. But, of course I believe in freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly.

■ **Lina Grau:** Is the issue of compliance by Russia of the Istanbul agreements still maintained formally and informally during the discussions? Why the issue of continuing the withdrawal of

ammunition from the Transnistrian region not raised? Moscow was saying that Igor Smirnov was against this process – now Smirnov is no longer in power, so the argument is no longer valid.

■ **Jennifer Brush:** The OSCE remains firmly committed to its mandate agreed to by all participating states at the 1999 Istanbul Ministerial:

- ensuring transparency of the removal and destruction of Russian ammunition and armaments; and
- co-ordinating financial and technical assistance to facilitate such withdrawal and destruction.

Since my arrival, in public and at OSCE Permanent Council sessions, I have repeated our commitment to this mandate and called on the Russian delegation to assist.

In addition to this removal constituting an international commitment, the presence of such enormous quantities of expired ammunition is a public health hazard, making it in everyone's interest for this commitment be fulfilled.

■ **Lina Grau:** Madam Ambassador, you came recently in office. How do you perceive the Republic of Moldova's society at the level of mentality, attitudes? How would you characterize it?

■ **Jennifer Brush:** Well it is definitely a traumatized post-conflict society and I would say that in any traumatized post-conflict society people have the tendency to gravitate towards populist rhetoric, populist theory. But certainly any future for Moldova would be a Moldova as a multicultural, diverse, multiethnic country, embracing all of its diversity, all of its differences. I guess I just don't see people here embracing

their diversity so much right now, I see them more differentiating themselves according to what language they speak or their ethnicity and I think that is unfortunate. I think the day will come when people will be able to embrace that diversity as really the richness of Moldova. As an outsider, what makes Moldova fascinating to me is its multi-ethnicity and its diversity. If I were an investor coming here to do business, that would be also very attractive to me.

■ **Lina Grau:** Same question regarding the Transnistrian region, because you often go there and deal with this region.

■ **Jennifer Brush:** Well yes, and the same answer, they are also a traumatized post-conflict society. Sometimes what happens in these conflicts, everyone wants to be the victim and nobody wants to be the aggressor, and so I see in this conflict that both sides consider themselves to be the victims and both sides consider the other side to be the aggressor. That is not healthy. The main difference between the two societies is that Moldova has had the opportunity to interact much more with the rest of the world because you are free in all of your borders except for the Transnistrian line. You are able to travel freely and to be able to experience the world. So I am quite impressed by Moldovans, particularly the younger generations of Moldovan whom I have met who have been able to go out into the world, go out in Europe, USA and receive training and higher education. Transnistrians have not had this opportunity and I think it has had an impact on their society as well, as they have not been able to travel freely in all directions. You could see as you travel around Transnistria that the young people haven't had as much opportunity to explore different ideas. That is why I am encouraged by the Transnistrian side's interest in the freedom of movement because they

appear to be showing interest in creating more opportunities for the young people to be able to travel more freely throughout Europe in all directions. Let me just emphasize the extent isolation, the many years living under the Smirnov administration, the effects of which are visible throughout Transnistria. I am impressed by the election of Mr. Shevciuk, he very much appealed to those youth who were interested in seeing the rest of the world, appealed to social media and I think that the social media in its own way perhaps gives a bit more of an opportunity to the young people from Transnistria to at least get more exposure to different ideas and I really admire that.

■ **Lina Grau:** In conclusion to what you have said above, people on the two banks of the Nistru River are more similar, or more different?

■ **Jennifer Brush:** Don't forget you are asking an American that question and we live and breathe the idea that all men are created equal.

■ **Lina Grau:** And then, maybe even in the same line with what we discussed above, I want to ask you how you see the European perspective of the Republic of Moldova? Is it a real perspective?

■ **Jennifer Brush:** I would say that all you need to do is look at the dynamics, the visit of Chancellor Merkel and the interactions with the Prime Minister Filat and you can see the demonstration of enormous good will towards Moldova. The other visits of the Members of the European Commission and the External Action Service I think also demonstrate to you the enormous interest in Brussels in having Moldova be a success story. Whether or not Moldova ever becomes a member of the European Union, the steps that this Government in taking in order to come up to EU standards is

admirable and difficult. It is also quite clear that solving this conflict is a critical step in European Union Membership. It is clear that European expansion is an attractive idea to the Europeans, but if you look at the geographic position of Moldova, the issue is trickier. I think there is a strong interest in a having democratic, prosperous and stable Moldova as a trade route as traditionally it has been between East and West and so I think there is considerable interest in development of this Black Sea region and the Danube region. This is an area that people should pay attention to and that has considerable economic potential not just for European, Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish investors, but it has considerable potential for the people who live here in the region. That is why I put so much emphasis and importance on the opening of the Gura Bacului Bridge.

■ **Lina Grau:** in the Moldovan society there is the opinion that Transnistria would be an impediment on the path of the Republic of Moldova towards the European Union. What is your response to this point of view?

■ **Jennifer Brush:** On the contrary, it is an opportunity; both sides know that resolving this conflict will provide economic benefits for the entire region, so it is an opportunity for everybody leaving on both sides of the River to lead better lives.

■ **Lina Grau:** Which are the most prominent projects which are unfolded at the moment by OSCE in Moldova?

■ **Jennifer Brush:** Our mandate it is to resolve the conflict through developing democracy and the other priorities of OSCE, and so this mission does quite a number of things, but I would like to think that all of them somehow involve resolving the conflict and promoting democracy and equal rights throughout the region. The work we do on gender for example is being done on both sides of the river, in order to have Moldova develop as a county that shows more respect for gender rights. The work we do on anti-trafficking is also equally significant, but it is also in order to create a better space for all Moldovans to live.

A couple of other significant projects that OSCE does is election monitoring and an overall review of electoral systems; with a goal of being able to have free, fair and transparent elections throughout the country.

One of the projects that I particularly like, which we did recently is encouragement and training of female politicians including coaching and fund raising, campaigning and how to be a responsible elected official. There is more and more academic research coming out that there is a direct correlation between the status of women and prosperity.

We also did a leadership school for young girls and women this summer and again that was encouraging for me to see young women not only so interested in learning about each other, but really in making a difference in their country.

Relations between Chisinau and Kiev: The Republic of Moldova has high expectations from the Ukrainian OSCE Presidency in 2013

■ **Lina Grau:** Republic of Moldova is the only country in Europe that has only two neighbours – Ukraine in the East and Romania to the West. Over the years, experts in foreign policy matters noted

regularly that relations with neighbours were not among the strengths of the Moldovan diplomacy and foreign policy. Today, we would like to discuss about the relations with Ukraine, with

the Moldovan Ambassador in Kiev, Ion Stavila. I asked him first of all if during the past years, since the Alliance for European Integration took over the power, the Moldovan diplomacy managed to contradict the impression created at a time that the relationship with Ukraine is not given due weight.

■ **Ion Stavila:** During the past two years, the relations between Chisinau and Kiev intensified more than ever. We have a very intense political dialogue at all levels and lately took place several official and working visits, and meetings with other occasions during international forums at the level of Heads of State,

heads of Parliaments at the level of Prime Ministers, visits and meetings at the level of Foreign Ministers. Also, there were consultations and meetings between line ministries.

The Joint Commission on Commercial - Economic Cooperation between those two countries resumed its activity last year after a long six years break. On the occasion of the Commission's meeting an economic forums took place, this becoming an indispensable element of the dialogue between state structures. The volume of bilateral trade increased considerably. It reached a record figure of over a billion dollars. Ukraine is among the top five trade partners of Moldova, occupying constantly second or third place in terms of exports and imports.

I could still talk a lot about how are developing the bilateral relations that come to disprove the perception that Chisinau or Kiev do not assign due weight. It's true that there is no peak of perfection and we work specifically in order to make things go better. So, as you see, Ukraine is a very important partner and that because relations with neighbours are among the major priorities of our foreign policy.

■ **Lina Grau:** Concrete things that you told us refer in large to the economic relations with Ukraine. Thus, from the political point of view as well as from the point of view of European integration, why Kiev is important for Chisinau?

■ **Ion Stavila:** For the prospect of our bilateral relations a special importance resides in our European aspirations. It is very important that the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have the same objective, considered in equal measure in Chisinau and Kiev as the number one priority in our foreign policy – namely European integration. If we talk about concrete facts, both the Republic of

Moldova and Ukraine are in the process of negotiating Association Agreements with the European Union which includes three chapters, three compartments: political dialogue, liberalisation of visa regime and free trade zone. Ukraine has concluded these negotiations at the end of last year. But Ukraine has started earlier than us these negotiations in 2008, while we've initiated negotiations in 2010. We have made a lot of progresses at some chapters even going ahead Ukraine on the European integration path. For instance, the liberalization of visa regime, Moldova recently passed to the second phase of the implementation of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan. However, Ukraine still has some arrears at this chapter. But I was saying that Ukraine has already concluded negotiations, initialled the document, further on come the technical procedures.

However, it's true that there are some political difficulties, which complicate somehow Ukraine's progress towards European integration, but I believe that these difficulties will be exceeded and Ukraine will continue with an increased pace activities aimed at European integration. So, it is very important, I repeat, this common trend of our countries to integrate in the EU is very important. And when we complete the negotiations on the Association Agreement, and I mean what is left on the chapter of the free trade zone, this will create better prerequisites in order to expand and deepen our bilateral cooperation with Ukraine, cooperation which will be placed in a broader context, an European one, which means that there will be some common rules. And this will facilitate a lot the bilateral cooperation.

■ **Lina Grau:** By the way, about the process of European integration. Chisinau has been recognized as the leader in the Eastern Partnership

initiative, the Republic of Moldova is called "success story" in Brussels. How are these things perceived in Ukraine? Is Kiev jealous on this more accelerated movement of the Republic of Moldova in the direction of European integration?

■ **Ion Stavila:** Jealousy is something natural for people, and states are represented also by people. Perhaps there is some jealousy and envy because somebody is advancing faster. But I don't think this is a serious problem and creates some difficulties in our relations, because today we advanced in a certain direction, tomorrow Ukraine will reach us ... I would say that a healthy competition between our countries in the context of European integration is something even normal, it is a motivation that can mobilise us to work better and to adopt our partner's best practices. I think that this competition is really useful.

■ **Lina Grau:** In bilateral relations with Ukraine, even if they say that they have not been neglected, for years there have been some tense, problematic dossiers – the dossier regarding properties in particular, border dossier, etc...Where do we stand on these chapters? Let's start with the properties of the Republic of Moldova in Ukraine.

■ **Ion Stavila:** Representatives of our concerned ministries and departments are working intensely on implementation of the objectives stipulated in the Protocol on the Intergovernmental Joint Commission from last year. These objectives are stipulated there too – relating to the finalization of the border demarcation, settlement of property issues and mutual recognition of property rights on objects that belong to each other on the territory of our countries. They are also working on drafting an agreement regarding the functioning of the Novodnestrovsk Hydro Energetic



Courtesy Photo

Complex and an agreement on the protection of the Nistru River basin and sustainable development of the Nistru River ecosystem. We have these few key dossier on which we have advanced a lot.

In fact, we have two sensitive points – in the area of the Giurgiulesti, to the South, and Novodnestrovsk, in the North, where is this hydro energetic power complex. We've advanced on these dossiers; we have elaborated draft documents that are going to be approved soon. Works are being done in parallel; several meetings at the level

of experts for the development and preparation of the final documents on the demarcation of the border which is at the end point have been done, this exercise lasting already for a long time, since 1999. Now things are going much better, and I would even say that we see the light at the end of the tunnel.

■ **Lina Grau:** Do you have any fixed indicative date for when it would be desirable to complete these negotiations with the border and when we will have a signed a document?

■ **Ion Stavila:** We do not have a fixed

date, for it is not so easy to settle a date. There is a technical thing that must be done and that requires time.

■ **Lina Grau:** What solutions have been found for the Transnistrian segment of the border? Is the completion of this segment in any way connected with the Transnistrian settlement?

■ **Ion Stavila:** We have made significant progress on the Transnistrian segment also, which as you know is not effectively controlled by the Moldovan authorities. There we are unfolding works of demarcation on the ground. We have



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453 km on the Transnistrian sector out of 1222 km that is the total length of our common border with Ukraine. Demarcation was made at about 80%-90%. So, work is in progress and we have advanced much.

We are sorry that the Transnistrian administration representatives do not participate in our common format at the works of the Joint Commission of demarcation, but we're glad they don't hinder these works, do not put any obstacles, difficulties and the work is carried out naturally. We consider that in the end we will find a formula of interaction with the Tiraspol administration, so that together with Ukraine to complete the process of demarcation on the Transnistrian sector too.

■ **Lina Grau:** Technically speaking, do professionals in geodesy from the Republic of Moldova have access in Transnistria in order to put the demarcation posts there?

■ **Ion Stavila:** Yet, the demarcation work is unfolding on the Ukrainian side, where all the representatives of the Republic of Moldova who are involved in these works have access to. So the pillars are being installed on the Ukrainian side. After we conclude these works, I don't think that technically it will be difficult, but I think it will be even simpler to install the pillars on our side. This thing is indispensable and without it we cannot consider that the demarcation process has been completed.

■ **Lina Grau:** If we are still talking about the Transnistrian issue, I wanted to ask what are Chisinau's expectations related to the fact that next year Ukraine will hold the Presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, one of the mediators in the 5 + 2 format?

Ion Stavila: Our expectations on the part of Ukraine, as well as from other partners directly involved in the settlement process, primarily those in the 5 + 2 format, are great. This is a natural thing. They are great in the sense that we want the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict to accelerate, to intensify and be completed as soon as possible.

In case of Ukraine we are talking about a country that knows very well the Transnistrian conflict, in view of the fact that Ukraine, as a neighbouring country, is affected to a great extent by this unsettled conflict. And here comes a natural interest of Ukraine to overcome this crisis, this conflict.

So, Ukraine is involved directly in the 5+2 format, it knows well the Transnistrian dossier, lately, Ukrainian representative is very active in the 5+2 format, it is a neighbouring country, affected by the conflict, interested in overcoming this crisis as soon as possible.

The Irish Presidency of the OSCE held this year is very active and effective. Or, in the case of Ukraine this Presidency may have double efficiency, regardless of the factors and premises we spoke earlier.

■ **Lina Grau:** The Republic of Moldova and Ukraine has also another format of cooperation – the Euro-regions, comprised of certain Romanian regions. Is there any interest in Kiev for this form of cooperation?

■ **Ion Stavila:** There is certainly. We have in fact three joint Euro-regions – lower Danube which is trilateral Euro-region, with Romania as part of it; Upper Prut – also trilateral with Romania; and, more recently, at the beginning of this year was set up a new bilateral Euro-region with Ukraine – is called

Nistru Euro-region. From the Ukrainian side this includes the Vinita region, and from the Moldovan side six districts bordering with Vinita region. Originally there was an initiative to include in this Euro-region two Transnistrian districts – Camenca and Râbnita. But former Transnistrian leader was more against than for. The current leaders in Tiraspol changed optics and apparently supports this participation.

From where does this interest for our common Euro-regions comes from? On the one hand, it comes from our active participation – Ukraine and Moldova – within the Eastern Partnership. Or, namely the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are the most advanced of the six neighbouring states with the EU to the East. And pushing forward cooperation within Euro-regions could give us some new opportunities to obtain some European funds.

I'm sorry to see that currently is not fully exploited the potential that we have within this form of cross-border cooperation, and on the other hand we lose the opportunity to obtain some European funds in this regard. There is interest. The inertia is confusing us. Or, now we work in Kiev and in Chisinau on some initiatives aimed at boosting cooperation within Euro-regions.

There seems to be a greater enthusiasm in the Nistru Euro-region. Communicating with the Vinita region administration I have found that there is an interest. You just need people to mobilize at the level of local administrations, because there are the leverages. And we are able to implement big, important projects of infrastructure, for instance. There is an idea to build a bridge in the town of Soroca, which would connect the city Soroca to Yampol, situated on the other side of the River Nistru, in

Ukraine. There are also other projects that could contribute substantially to enhancing interpersonal contacts, cultural exchanges and trade. I hope that in a near future we could revive this form of cooperation, possibly through the establishment of a high-level meeting Republic of Moldova - Ukraine or even of a trilateral meeting with the participation of Romania.

■ **Lina Grau:** I have asked you how important is Ukraine for the Republic of Moldova. I'd like to know and how the presence of Moldovans is felt in Ukraine? How is it presented?

■ **Ion Stavila:** The Moldovan presence in Kiev and in Ukraine in general is felt a lot, because in Ukraine there is the most numerous Moldovan diaspora, the largest community of Moldovans living outside the Republic of Moldova. There, our brothers, live historically in Moldovan settlements since ancient times. They develop and maintain their

cultural, ethnic and linguistic identity. I have visited several times these places - in Cernauti region and in the region of Odessa. We support them how we can - with literature for children and kindergartens, the specialization of teachers in the cultural field, exchanges of students. I mean everything that contributes to the preservation and development of ethnic and cultural identity of the communities. They are organized in associations and meet periodically. We invite them to the activities organized by the Embassy. For example, this year we organized in Kiev Martisorul Feast, to which we invited famous ethno-folk band Ștefan-Vodă, who has enjoyed a huge success.

Since November last year – I want to tell this thing with pride – on the territory of the Pecerska Lavra in Kiev works a Moldovan - Romanian parish. In the main Cathedral on the Lavra's territory, which is called Assumption (otherwise

where is buried Petru Movilă – our great ancestor, Metropolitan of Kiev, having Moldovan origin), there is Romanian language service every Sunday. We go with families, with colleagues from the Embassy, every Sunday at this service made by two young brothers – Dumitru and Nicolae Popescu from Cernauti region, of Romanian origin.

So, as you see, our diaspora is visible in Ukraine. We have to recognize that we must do more to support our brothers in Ukraine and we work in this direction.