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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. The negotiations round on the Association Agreement will be followed by telephone consultations to finalize the details. The Vilnius Summit is likely to be successful for the Republic of Moldova, even if the Association Agreement is not initialled.
2. Quo vadis, Moldova? An editorial signed by the Executive Director of the Foreign Policy Association, Victor Chirila.
3. Progress Report of the European Neighbourhood Policy, presented by Stefan Fule in Brussels and by Dirk Schuebel in Chisinau. Feedback by representatives of the political parties from the Moldovan Parliament.

Foreign Policy Association in conjunction with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is inviting you to a series of programmes dedicated to the Republic of Moldova's foreign policy and European integration issues.

The Vilnius Summit is likely to be successful for the Republic of Moldova, even if the Association Agreement is not initialled

The second round of this year's negotiations on the Association Agreement and Free Trade Agreement, which took place on March 11-15, was announced as the last one before the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November. Last year they were even talking about the fact that two documents could be signed at that Summit. But at the beginning of this year, the authorities stated that because of the complex technical procedures that the agreements have to go through in the European Commission, the documents would be only initialled in Vilnius.

Back from Brussels, the Prime Minister Vlad Filat, said that several rounds of telephone discussions and teleconferences would be held to clarify several aspects of the Free Trade Agreement, aspects that mainly related to the agriculture.

Vlad Filat: Moldovan negotiators have completed the negotiations at the stage of the negotiations round. Following this stage, the



remaining problems that are related to the terminology and concern the legal aspect are to be completed during telephone discussions and videoconferences. As for the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, we have not completed the discussions as regards the agriculture. Apparently, it will be no need to organize a new round, and we should complete the negotiations within this Agreement in June too.



For me personally, for the Government, it is important that the negotiations are organized in such a way that the Republic of Moldova obtains good conditions to implement the Free Trade Agreement and, certainly, a perspective for our future political relations with the EU, by signing the Association Agreement. By the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, the Republic of Moldova is likely to obtain success which will not belong to a political party or a political leader, but it will belong to the Republic of Moldova.

Lina Grau: President Nicolae Timofti said in an interview with a private TV channel that the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Agreement with the EU will be neither signed, nor initialled at the Vilnius Summit.

Nicolae Timofti: That final act will not be signed this autumn as it was planned, but it will probably be signed at the beginning of the next year: this is related to technical aspects. It's huge workload which involves translation of the documents in the 23 languages of the EU. The European Commission estimated that they would not be able to finalise the translation.

Lina Grau: However, the Head of the European Union Delegation, Dirk Schuebel, says that the Summit of the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius has all the ingredients to be a success for the Republic of Moldova.

Dirk Schuebel: We have completed the negotiations process with a speed record - no other country has managed to conduct negotiations in such a short period of time. I can tell you for sure that the Summit in Vilnius will be really successful for the Republic of Moldova. This Agreement that we are about to sign is the most ambitious agreement ever signed by the European Union. It will provide unique opportunities for the Moldovan economy, for it is to be included in the largest single market - the European market.

The Republic of Moldova in the EU Progress Report on the European Neighbourhood Policy - leader or laggard?

On Wednesday, March 20th, The European Commission published the Progress Report on the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2012.

Last year, the Republic of Moldova was considered an absolute leader in the relations with EU and was constantly regarded as the "success story" of the Eastern Partnership. After the unleash of the political crisis at the beginning of this year and the overturning of the Alliance for European Integration Government, the praises for Chisinau faded away from the European officials' speeches. Instead, we have encouragements for political class unity in the spirit of national interest and strengthening of a majority that would continue the Republic of Moldova's European course.

The Progress Report speaks of the year 2012 as being a success for the Republic of Moldova. Spectacular progress has been made in negotiating the Association Agreement and Free Trade Agreement; reforms in several areas advanced and most of the commitments under the Agreement with the EU on Visa Liberalization have been fulfilled.

The arrears that the European Commission has emphasized concern the fight against corruption, reform of the judiciary and law enforcement bodies and observance of the human rights.

At the same time, the document notes that the political tensions earlier this year within the ruling coalition, tensions that led to the fall of the government, have questioned the political stability of the country.

Presenting this report at a press conference, the Head of the EU Delegation to Moldova, Dirk Schuebel said the document comes up with a number of recommendations too.

Dirk Schuebel: We would like to see Moldova advancing vigorously in reforming justice and the law enforcement bodies, including the Ministry of the Internal Affairs, intensifying the fight against corruption, notably by



reforming the judiciary and prosecution and ensure full functionality of the National Anti-Corruption Centre. Both the business environment, treatment and the registration procedures of the foreign investors must be improved, while the black economy - countered. Moldovan authorities must ensure respect for human rights and implement all provisions of the Anti-discrimination Law, to ensure real independence of the CCA, initiate public administration reform through the decentralization at the local level.

Lina Grau: At the same time, Dirk Schuebel said that the Association Agreement which is now being completed, would not contain in the preamble a reference to the European perspective for Moldova as the Moldovan authorities would have liked.

Dirk Schuebel: Certainly, the preamble of any document indicates the general direction of the relationship and it is not a secret that the Moldovan side would have wanted to have the perspective of a member country specifically mentioned in the preamble to this Agreement. But at this point, it is extremely difficult to convince all EU countries to provide the Republic of Moldova this clear perspective of membership. But I am sure that a very good compromise formula that would leave the EU door open for Moldova will be found. My advice is that the reforms should advance and, at a later stage, when these reforms are already made, such a perspective will come almost automatically.

Editorial

The government and the opposition in the Republic of Moldova have opposing views regarding the strategic course of the country - a problem that remains as acute at the moment as it was over the last 20 years of independence. "*Quo vadis, Moldova?*" is the title of today's editorial signed by the Executive Director of the Foreign Policy Association, Victor Chirila.



Victor Chirila: Quo vadis, Moldova?

For two decades already we have been asking ourselves: Quo vadis, Moldova?

For two decades, the answer has been escaping us as a Fata Morgana in the Sahara desert. For two decades, the Republic of Moldova has been struggling between to be and not to be. For two decades, Moldova has been swinging confused between East and West. For two decades, we have been choosing between democracy and oligarchy, wealth and poverty, between the modern state and the bankrupt one, forgotten at the edge of the European civilization.

For two decades, we have been running to catch the train of the history. For two decades, we have been wandering aimlessly in the labyrinth of transition to nowhere. For two decades, we have been waiting that someone will take us home and take care of us as orphans. For two decades, we have been building our future dreaming of the past.

For two decades, we have been longing for a cheap life. For two decades, we have sold our destiny for bread that costs 16 kopecks, sausage for three roubles and gas at a reduced price. For two decades, we have got only the circus and no bread. For two decades, we have been going into the wide world in search for a decent life.

For two decades, we have been working for foreigners to feed those left at home. For two decades, instead of moving forward, we have chosen to turn left, going back. For two decades, overwhelmed by problems, we have buried the head into the sand, forgetting that our back is bare. For two decades, we have been living with the idea that it could be worse. For two decades, the good has taken long to come and the evil has blown down our neck.

After two decades, the Republic of Moldova still faces its eternal dilemma, where to? After two decades, we have the rare opportunity to break the cycle of our interminable transition without destination. After two decades, Europe is watching us. After two decades, for the first time, we are not alone while we are looking for our purpose in life. After two decades, we can build the future home. After two decades, Moldova may become a success story, an example to be followed by the others. After two decades, we have a chance to regain the dignity of being Europeans. After two decades, the fate has given us the unique, unrepeatable chance to return home, to Europe. After two decades, we have the chance to become masters in our country, as regards our present and future.

After two decades, it's time to work and to be united. It is time to grow up as a society. It's time for our politicians to master their egos, to think and act like statesmen. It's time to look around us and realize that the window of opportunity that Europe has opened for us will close soon, even sooner than Mr. Filat, Lupu and Ghimpu imagine.

After two decades of labour on the edge, Europe is wondering whether we are apt not to miss this opportunity, if we are able to capitalize on this opportunity, if we deserve to be Europeans. Are we able to dash, once and for all, these doubts? Are we able to catch the train of the history?

Unfortunately once again, hardly arrived at an important crossroads in our history, we are divided, confused and undecided. A blind shot, aimed at a boar during a royal hunting, transformed our hopes into illusions and our trust in disappointment. The bullet hit all of us, our future, ending the life of an innocent young person, destroying a family, dispelling a success story, annihilating an alliance, overturning a government, and paralyzing a country. Moldova is thrown again into the vortex of instability and insecurity as regards its future. What is next, where are we going? Again, the eternal existential question of the Moldovans.

2013 is crucial for the future destiny of Moldova. This year, we are to convene with the EU upon the most ambitious agreement in our history - the Association Agreement, which will open the way for the economic integration and political association of Moldova with the EU. Moldova and the EU will form a common democratic, economic and political space. Moldova will get unlimited access to the EU market of 500 million consumers and will confirm a strategic alliance with 28 member states. Also, the Association Agreement will facilitate the visa liberalization with the EU, following the example of the Western Balkan states.

But for all this to become real, we need stability, solidarity, reason and faith in us and in those to whom we entrusted our destiny. Do our politicians have enough wisdom, reason and foresight to understand the stake of their possible cowardice?

If not, what do we do about them? Do we vote for them again? Or do we turn to the past again?

Let's hope that Filat, Lupu and Ghimpu will disengage us from this ungracious and fatalistic dilemma. Otherwise, we will all be responsible for a failed, unrecoverable future.

Stefan Fule: The European aspirations of the Eastern Partnership countries could be acknowledged at the Vilnius Summit

Presenting in Brussels the Report on the European Neighbourhood Policy, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Stefan Fule, said that he was satisfied with the cooperation with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and, to a certain extent, with Armenia, while stressing the fact that the relations with Ukraine marked a regression in 2012.

Speaking about the prospect of the visa liberalization for the Moldovan citizens, Stefan Fule expressed hope that the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict will allow the citizens on the left border of the Nistru to enjoy freedom of movement in Europe.

"I hope, to the benefit of people living in Transnistria, that the solution to Transnistria issue is going to be found soon, because the

sooner is going to be found, the sooner ALL the citizens living in Moldova will be able to benefit from that visa free regime", the European Commissioner said.

At the same time, Stefan Fule said that Vilnius Summit could become a historical one, because it is for the first time when the European aspirations of some of the Eastern Partnership countries could be acknowledged.



Valeriu Ghiletschi: The Republic of Moldova remains a leader of the Eastern Partnership



I believe that the Republic of Moldova remains a leader of the Eastern Partnership, but the recent political developments in Chisinau raised some eyebrows. Depending on the outcome of this political crisis, I think that the stress will be laid back where it was at first.

In my opinion, we could look at the bright side. These signals are rather an encouragement, a reason for us to overcome the crisis and remain that successful project for the EU. We have a great responsibility; all political leaders should realize this. I'm glad however, that credit was given for the results that we have obtained. Overcoming this crisis is extremely important for our partners; they urge us to find solutions inside, to keep the parliamentary majority and this European course.

Lina Grau: If the crisis is not overcome - anyway, we must take into account this option - where to will Moldova head?

Valeriu Ghiletschi: I always looked at things realistically and I used the biblical paradigm of those 40 years, even if I do not want to be pessimistic. In my opinion, the poisonous scenario does not mean giving up the European course; it is about delaying this course. I believe that the political struggle will continue, efforts will be undertaken to overcome the difficulties we have. If there is a possible election campaign, we will try to convince the people that we need to maintain our course towards the European integration during this campaign. If we fail, that means that, at least for a while, we will have to postpone these things. Because, ultimately, this European project is not just one of the leaders, it is a project of the entire society.

Ana Gutu: The democratic parties should strengthen themselves to restore the coalition and continue the European course

I think that the Republic of Moldova should retain its optimism regarding the European integration. It is true that in an emerging democracy, such as the Republic of Moldova, errors may occur due to the political immaturity and exaggerated ambitions of the political leaders. And let us not forget that the political party system in the Republic of Moldova is very deficient. Therefore, the political deadlock, this crisis that was triggered after December 23, 2012 and which is likely to enter the school textbooks was a beneficial one. In that the state institutions found themselves faced with the need to review their functionality and return the strategies, tactics and action plans to what is called a mature democracy.

We must not forget that during the three years an enormous workload was done. A mission to assess our European course that has recently visited Chisinau was satisfied with the amount of work done on one hand by the politicians - be it the governmental or parliamentary diplomacy - and, on the other hand, of the apparatus of the public servants.



Marian Lupu: As for the aspects of the European integration, we should be realistic, not romantic

Marian Lupu: If we look very realistic at this situation, we find that in general this ratio has a positive character, while indicating those areas and a number of actions that must be taken to ensure our European course.

We have to keep working, do our homework, understand that the European integration is not just empty and beautiful words, because the words do have an effect, but not for a long time. The most durable effects are brought by concrete actions, which are also the most compelling ones for the Republic of Moldova to be accepted later on as a candidate country and then, in due course, a state that joins the EU.

For me, the negotiation and signing of this Agreement is not a matter of competition - who signs it first, who is the second to sign... This is a childish approach. A qualitative Agreement, which comes to offer a clear perspective in the political field, and favourable conditions for our economic development in the economic and trade field, is what count for the country. And we must take less interest in what Armenia, Ukraine and other countries do.



It would be great if we could avoid early elections that will not bring anything new, because the structure of the future Parliament will be about the same, with some small gains or losses by certain parliamentary parties. But all these parties will enter the new Parliament too. Now it is necessary for the parties involved in the process of negotiations to bring to the fore the national interest.

Lina Grau: The fact that we are not presented as a success story of the Eastern Partnership anymore, as an example for the other countries, but we are aligned with the other members of the Eastern Partnership, does this mean a slowdown in our European course?

Ana Gutu: You should not look at this as a slowdown in our European course and should regard it as a breakthrough capacity of other states, which are part of the Eastern Partnership. Georgia, Armenia and Ukraine, they all want to follow this European course. That is, to maintain this status of *niña bonita*, as a colleague from the Netherlands used to say, meaning "a beautiful young girl", of the Eastern Partnership, it is necessary not to despair and to persevere. Let us leave aside the fads and work, because this is the only way we can get where we proposed to - in the EU.

Lina Grau: In your opinion, is it a problem or not that the clause requested by Moldova of offering clear European prospects in the foreseeable future, maybe 10-15 years, will not be provided for in the preamble of the Association Agreement?

Ana Gutu: It is not a specific term of reference; it is about Article 49 of the Treaty of Lisbon, which talks about the possibility of EU enlargement. And, as far as I know, the team of negotiators on the part of the European Commission has no mandate to include this reference to Article 49. And it is necessary to have a consensus within the European Parliament to change the mandate of negotiators on the part of the European Commission. The parliamentary group of the Liberal and Democrats supports us; the Group of Socialists supports us. It remains to be seen what the largest European parliamentary group, that is the European People's Party, will do. Consequently, all efforts should be concentrated in this direction, for instance, those of the LDPM, which is part of the EPP, and which should convince its colleagues to vote to amend the negotiating mandate for the European Commission. It is enough to make reference to Article 49 in order to make sure that we have this door open to EU membership as a titular state.

Grigore Petrenco: Communists convinced themselves that the European Neighbourhood Policy is a big failure

To be honest, I have never seen any praising of the governance in this progress report. I agree with those who say that it is rather a regression report. The current government of the Republic of Moldova was harshly criticized for corruption, lack of reforms in respect of the National Anti-corruption Centre, the judiciary. They have been also criticized as regards the NIT and the communist symbols.

To be honest, I would not even exaggerate the importance of such reports. The entire EU Neighbourhood Policy is a great failure. It is sufficient for Mr. Fuele to read again the statement made by Prime Minister Filat on February 13, when he denounced the Agreement establishing the Alliance for European Integration, to understand what a successful country and "a success story" the Republic of Moldova is. We may also write with the same success reports on the progress or regress of the EU and give advice and guidance - for example, the EU would better adhere to the European Convention on Human Rights, which it has not done until now. But we do not give advice because we are modest.

Given the maximum political support and not only the political one, given by the EU to the Republic of Moldova's current government, certainly, this report probably would have been different if it was not for this scandal and the destruction of the parliamentary majority by the parliamentary majority itself. But under these conditions, when they call each other bandits, corrupt, smugglers, thieves, oligarchs, puppeteers and so on, of course the EU cannot fail to notice these things.

I am not satisfied with this report. In my opinion, it does not fully reflect the real situation in the Republic of Moldova. The real situation is more complicated, more difficult and there are many more problems than those mentioned in this report.

Lina Grau: According to the Party of Communists, from the political point of view, where is the place of the Republic of Moldova - the European Union or the Eurasian Union?



Grigore Petrenco: We do not give up the course of the European integration primarily because the Republic of Moldova is a member of the Council of Europe. We have some obligations to the Council of Europe, nobody is going to leave the Council of Europe, all European standards and democratic values are defined by the Council of Europe, not the European Union. So, in this sense, we have absolutely nothing against the course of the European integration.

Lina Grau: But Russia and Ukraine are also part of the Council of Europe...

Grigore Petrenco: Yes, but the Council of Europe is a much broader European political institution that establishes democratic norms and European values. In the opinion of the Party of Communists, the Republic of Moldova should be open to all in its foreign policy - both to the West and the East. One of the basic foreign policy principles outlined in the programme of the CP is the principle of openness of integration both with our partners in the West and those in the East.

Today nobody can say what will happen to the European Union in 3, 5 or 10 years. All European officials have already stated that the Republic of Moldova does not have for sure a European perspective in the foreseeable future. So, we cannot remain isolated from other integration projects. There are some other projects that are developed today in the East, there where the Republic of Moldova, its citizens and enterprises may register benefits if the country will participate in this project. Our accession to the Eurasian Customs Union will bring economic benefits and does not contravene at all to the fact that we are part of the Council of Europe. Nobody prohibits the members of the Council of Europe to participate in various projects of economic integration.

And I think we need to be realistic and pragmatic. If the European Union closed the door, we must seek other solutions for the Republic of Moldova and not be fed with promises on the part of the officials of the European Commission. First, we must consider today's reality, the interests of the citizens and their living conditions.