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EU – Moldova: what perspectives for the Eastern Partnership in Moldova?

Introduction: Moldova’s new Europeanization hopes

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is the latest development in the EU’s strategy towards its neighbourhood. It was launched as a response to the objective criticism that European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) fell short of making a distinction between “neighbours of Europe” (the South dimension) and “European neighbours” (Eastern dimension). However, despite the fact that the new Eastern European countries were finally offered a distinct framework within the ENP, the EaP has disappointed them once again. Georgia and Azerbaijan complained especially about the non inclusion of a clause on territorial integrity, whereas Ukraine and Moldova’s (and others) main concern was the non recognition of their European integration aspirations, identifying them as only “Eastern European Partners” and “partner countries”, instead of the initial formulation of “European countries”.

The then communist President of Moldova, V. Voronin has openly criticized the EaP for the lack of the integration perspective characterizing it as “another CIS” (Community of Independent States), but this time “under EU control”, and has stated that the proposed additional funding is nothing else than a “candy”. However, the situation has significantly changed after the July 2009 legislative elections as a result of which the Government was formed by the Alliance for European Integration (AEI), composed by democratic and liberal parties. AEI was eager to implement required reforms and accelerate Moldova’s European integration and to become the Eastern Partnership’s “front-runner”.

The new installed government made of the European integration the strategic objective of the country and has shown impressive determination in exploiting all new advantages that were offered within the EaP, most importantly the visa liberalization. In this respect, unlike Russia or Ukraine, which expected concrete promises before engaging in technical reforms, Moldova’s new government has started implementing reforms concerning visa liberalisation even before being asked by the EU¹. Thus, in June 2010 the dialogue concerning the visa regime liberalization was launched and on 16 December 2010 the EU member states have approved the Action Plan on visa liberalisation. This document was presented to Chişinău (Moldova’s capital) by the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malmstrom in January 2011; and Moldova’s prime minister, Vlad Filat was

¹ Paul Ivan and Cristian Ghinea, “Making sense of EU’s Eastern Partnership: Moldova as an opportunity”, *Romanian Center for European Policies Policy Memo*, no 13, September 2010.

then expressed its conviction that a visa-free regime with the EU could be obtained by the second half of 2012 (within 18 months; however, a more realistic expectation would be three years). Four months after the creation of the Alliance for European Integration, Moldova started in January 2010 negotiations with the EU on the Association Agreement. As about the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, the situation looks more complicated with negotiations being expected to start later this year (the implementation of the DCFTA will require consistent resources, around 20% of Moldova's GDP²).

The new government has announced a series of central reforms in order to consolidate democracy in Moldova. It registered important achievements (considerable improving the electoral framework and enhancing the quality of elections; transparency in the decision making and enhancing participation of the civil society; a dramatic improvement of media freedom; and many others reforms in concrete sectors), but there remain crucial long-term reforms as reform of the judiciary, prosecution and police. For this reason, many Moldovan experts are raising serious questions over "success story" potential predicting "disappointment", "disgrace", "Ukrainization danger" and other wording characterising possible future EU attitudes toward Moldova.

That is why the first part of this paper take issue with some wide spread assumptions concerning the prospects for Moldova's rapprochement with the EU in the context of internal Moldovan challenges and external ones. I will underline a series of arguments in support of the idea that Moldova will stand high on the EU radar screen even under the condition of a slowing intensity of reforms implementation. In the same context will be assessed the hypothesis that the "Arab spring" could shift EU focus from the east to the South. In this respect, we could find strong arguments that this does not pose a challenge for Moldova and for EaP. The second part will look at two perspectives that are only occasionally treated within the EaP expert community, as the question of the European project's future and most importantly, the *uni-multipolarisation* within the EU. This second perspective has concrete implications for Moldova in the context of its efforts to reintegrate the Transnistrian separatist region. As the writing of this paper does not permit the formulation of clear conclusions (given the fact that important event will take place in few days), I will return completing it in the next few days...

I. Moldova's domestic challenges in the context of "Arab spring"

Moldova, next failed "success story"?

There is a wide-spread opinion, especially within Moldovan expert community, that Moldova runs the "danger of Ukrainization". Political analysts express serious warnings over the European future of the Republic of Moldova taking into account principally two aspects, one related to domestic context and the second to the external context. First of all, it is the difficulty or incapacity of current government led by the Alliance for European Integration to meet the EU expectations by concrete long-term reforms. This would, as argument runs,

² Ibid.

endanger the interest for Moldova especially in the context of European economic crisis and most importantly, in the context of the context of “Arab spring” which could shift EU’s attention towards the Southern dimension.

One leading Moldova political analyst speaking about the future of EU – Moldova relations stated that, “there are indicators showing that the Republic of Moldova could [rather] reproduce the Ukrainian scenario”³. It is not very clear what means this “Ukrainian scenario” and what could be EU’s attitude toward Moldova in concrete terms? Another two Moldovan analysts are sustaining the same argument but again, they substitute concrete hypotheses with epithets in describing the future possible EU’s approach to Moldova as “EU fatigue”, “failed” or “would-be” “success stories” (when referring to Ukraine and Georgia), “disenchantment” or “disgrace”⁴. We could see a more articulated vision at the ex-counselor of the Moldova’s ex-Acting President, Mihai Ghimpu, who recently stated that Moldova is all but “fashion”, and as all fashion is swiftly passing, EU could eventually turn its back to Moldova and redirect attention and efforts to the Southern dimension⁵.

It is realistic to expect that the prolonged lack of systemic reforms in key domains will hinder Moldova’s rapprochement to EU, as for example the Interior Ministry which is a critical condition for the visa regime liberalization, but it is a bit exaggerated to predict that without a breakthrough in systemic democratic reforms, Moldova could fall in EU’s “disgrace”, that EU could lose interest in Moldova turning instead its attention to other places, etc.

Certainly, it is possible that EU will express some signs of “fatigue” if Moldova will not meet EU’s reform demands, but there are good indices that EU will continue to show interest for Moldova.

The fallacy of Ukraine analogy

Certainly, there are real disappointments in EU regarding Ukraine. But it is not correct to assume that Ukraine has fallen in EU’s “disgrace” or that EU has lost its interests in Ukraine. This idea neglect EU efforts to maintain Ukrainian interests in EU. Just one example, the announcement that the EU and Ukraine could sign the Association Agreement by the end of this year shows that EU is still interested in Europeanizing Ukraine.

Even if one could maintain that Ukraine is a failed success story and that Moldova could repeat its fate, there are some important features which make Moldova a different

³ Igor Botan, « Povestea de succes vs. sindromul ucrainean », 15 March, 2011, <http://www.e-democracy.md/monitoring/politics/comments/myth-about-story/>

⁴ It is perhaps worth citing here these two authors in order to have the Moldovan vision on this issue.

1) Leonid LITRA: “*internal and external nuances create the necessary conditions for a possible **EU fatigue** towards the Republic of Moldova that will appear next year if Chisinau will not be able to offer concrete results in order to meet The EU expectations [...] **Ukraine and Georgia**, as a result of revolutions, have passed through this cycle of “success story”, **failure** and **disappointment**. [...] If the results are late, the EU fatigue towards Moldova and its **disgrace are inevitable**.” In “How to avoid the EU fatigue towards Moldova?”, *IDIS Foreign Policy Statewatch*, issue 23, May 2011.*

2) Alex Oprunenco:[...] *reform process can remain on its ‘mimicking’ path, obstructed by vested interests and heightening domestic political instability, or by shift of the EU interests to its southern neighborhood or to the financial stability of the Community members, etc. All of these can unravel Moldova’s European endeavor. In the worst case the EU will become **disenchanted** with Moldova’s inability to deliver on its commitments. [...] **Moldova risks filling the ranks of others would-be, but unattained, success stories** in European neighborhood.” In *Expert-Grup Axpres Analize*, no 41, 4 May 2011.*

⁵ Interview with Dan Dungaci (in Romanian), *HotNews.ro*, 7 June 2011.

case, thus Ukrainian analogy becoming at least problematic. At a basic level, Moldova is advantaged by its modest size. There are more hopes and potential to be a success story (and to maintain this hope) for a country with a population of some 3.8 million people (Moldova with the Transnistrian region), than with a population of some forty-six million peoples (as Ukraine). In terms of trade, Moldova is the most dependent EaP country on EU markets. If in the last few years EU became the first trade partner of Moldova (in 2009 50.6% of Moldovan goods were directed to EU markets), Ukraine sells to EU only one quarter of its exports and the general trend is declining in recent years.⁶ Cultural factors are also important here. Moldova shares a common language with Romania. Thus, it could benefit from the fact that there is already a translation of the *acquis communautaire* and save enormous resources and time. Transnistrian conflict is another issue which favors a special attention to Moldova. EU has no interest in the “second Kaliningrad” on its borders and no interest to permit the establishment of another Russian military base in the region. The only viable solution to the Transnistrian conflict which will not damage EU security interest is to Europeanize Moldova with its Transnistrian separatist region. Sure, Transnistria could create considerable obstacles for Moldova’s European integration in the future, but in the short and medium term it would rather attract special attention from the EU. Last, but perhaps one of the most important factors is Moldova’s continuous support for joining the EU. Moldova is one of the most pro-European countries in the region, with the most pro-European government and with a consensus within society and political circles in support of the EU. A recent national survey shows that in the event of a referendum on the accession of Moldova to the EU, 62% of citizens would vote for⁷. In Ukraine we see a consistent slow drop in support for EU integration; with the highest support being registered in 2002 (65.1%) and a declining trend in recent years (54.2% in December 2007 and 44.4% in November 2009)⁸. In this sense, we could even state that it was not a “Ukrainian fatigue” in EU, but a “European fatigue” in Ukraine.

Eastern regional context

A brief observation of the developments in the EaP region shows a simple fact: EU democratization efforts have overall failed. Andrew Wilson and Nicu Popescu from ECFR have recently observed that despite increasing presence of the EU in the region, Brussels did not manage to transform this presence into power: “[...] *the EU has failed not only to achieve most of its objectives, but also to prevent a deterioration of trends on the ground. In fact, every country in the region except Moldova is less democratic now than it was five years ago.*”⁹ In this respect, Moldova is for now, and for the near future, the only hope for a regional “success story”. If the EU will learn the right lessons from its experience with Ukraine, there are good chances for EU to boost its relations with Moldova. However, even if Moldova is too little to be a game changer in the region, it will at least show that EU’s is not totally incapable to project its normative power in its neighbourhood.

⁶ Katarzyna Pelczynska-Nalecz, “Integration or Imitation? EU Policy towards its Eastern Neighbours”, *IFRI-OSW Programme Geremek*, May 2011, p. 16-17, <http://www.ifri.org/?page=detail-contribution&id=6577>

⁷ Sondaj National, “Uniunea Europeană - marea provocare a Republicii Moldova”, IMAS-IDIS, March 2011, http://www.viitorul.org/public/3285/ro/sondaj_de_opinie%20UE.pdf

⁸ Dariya Orlova, “EU in Ukrainian eyes: pretty enough?”, *EaP Community*, 16 June, 2011,

http://www.easternpartnership.org/publication/2011-06-16/eu-ukrainian-eyes-pretty-enough#_ftn3

⁹ Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson, “Turning presence into power: lessons from eastern neighbourhood”, *ECFR Policy Brief*, May, 2011, http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR31_ENP_AW.pdf

The Southern danger for the East?

In respect to the context of the “Arab spring” and the fears concerning a potential shift of the EU attention from the East to the South, we should first of all emphasize that the recent review of the ENP does not contain any signal that this could be real. Quite the contrary, it clearly states that EU’s new approach aims to “strengthen the two regional dimensions of the European Neighbourhood Policy”¹⁰. In this regard, Štefan Füle has recently declared: “[...] *I want to make absolutely clear: there is nothing like a shift of focus from the east to the south. There is nothing like an imbalance in our attention and our relationship with our neighbourhood. Both south and east are for us very important. If you look at our policies, although they might not make it to the front pages of the newspapers, we are more committed to the east than before.*”¹¹ Moreover, the principle of “more for more” could be real chances for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to distance themselves from countries such as Belarus or Azerbaijan and get “more” for their “more” European identity and determination.

Two more aspects should be considered here. First it’s the contrast between the South and the East. Even if the East has overall delivered deceptive results in terms of democratization, some cases as Moldova and Ukraine look good enough to be evoked as examples of closer relations with the EU in the “Arab spring” context. As one observer remarked, “*while the Arab revolutions have exposed the failures of EU foreign policy in the South, the Eastern Partnership is a modest EU success story in terms of closer relations with Moldova and Ukraine.*”¹² Thus, we see in the ENP review an appreciation assessing that “[t]he Eastern Partnership has significantly boosted relations between the EU and its eastern neighbours over the past two years.”¹³ The second aspect is a lesson that EU should learn from the events in the South. It teaches EU that it is worth strengthening fragile democracies and avoiding the acceleration/consolidation of authoritarian trends because “building democracy on the ruins of a failing regime is a very difficult, risky and costly challenge”¹⁴ and because the authoritarian regimes are very instable and that the consequences of their collapse could threaten even the existing order of the Union (as in the case of Schengen rules review).

New hopes for ‘European perspective’: Polish presidency

The second half of this year will be the most interesting period for the Eastern Partnership when Poland will hold the EU Council presidency. Under its rule, the EU could change its approach over that most prized notion – possible EU membership in the future. We could at least expect that Warsaw would push hard in this direction. There are clear messages in this respect. At a recent Visegrad Group Summit held in Bratislava on 17 June, the Polish Prime

¹⁰ European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “A new response to a changing Neighbourhood”, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, 25 May, 2011, p. 2.

¹¹ Štefan Füle: EU won't allow Arab revolutions to be 'stolen', *EurActiv*, 13 April, 2011,

¹² Honor Mahony, “Polish EU presidency to test treaty rules” *EU Observer*, 7 June 2011.

¹³ A new response to a changing Neighbourhood, p. 12.

¹⁴ Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, “The EU's post-revolutionary neighbourhood policy: We should not forget the East”, *EurActiv*, 7 April 2011.

Minister, Donald Tusk has stressed the importance offering the European integration perspective for those countries that aspire to EU membership. Previously, on 31 March, Andrzej Cieszkowski (the Polish Foreign Minister's Plenipotentiary for the Eastern Partnership) speaking at the EU – Moldova Forum in Chişinău, stated that, “EU membership perspectives may be announced to the seeking countries concerned”¹⁵, at the EaP Summit to be held in Poland in September. Poland’s voice within the EU is too important to be neglected and given its preoccupation with the Eastern Partnership which stands high on its foreign policy agenda (owing to its special relations with Eastern countries [especially Ukraine] and to power politics in the East [Russian factor] and inside the EU), Poland will do its best in order to boost the Europeanization process of these countries.

Besides Poland’s structural and cultural interests for the Eastern countries and its determination, there are two contextual factors which could play in favor for upgrading relations between EU and some EaP countries. In Ukraine we see that Russia intensifies its effort directed at attracting (or constraining) Kiev into its Custom Union with Kazakhstan and Belarus in the context of the readiness of EU and Ukraine to sign the Association Agreement by the end of this year¹⁶. Moscow has the potential to endanger the upgrading of EU-Ukraine relationship that is why the EU should seriously consider the *European perspective* for Ukraine if EU do not wish completely losing Ukraine (and Moldova as a consequence, given that Ukraine’s position is determinant for Moldova’s foreign policy options). Another aspect regards Moldova directly. Taking account of the PCRMs (Party of Communist of Republic of Moldova) recent interesting score in Chişinău at the recent local elections (the PCRMs obtained the majority in the Municipal Council (5 June) and the communist candidate, Igor Dodon has lost the mayoral post only with a difference of 1% in favor AEI’s candidate Dorin Chirtoacă (19 June), there are some risks that CPRM could trigger new anticipated parliamentary elections (by the end of the year or in the beginning of 2012). In this context, the EU could be more indulgent and grant Moldova with the European perspective in order to avoid future political instability.

Moldova’s political deadlock

Political stalemate in Moldova and the impossibility to elect a permanent President by the Parliament is another issue that provokes debates in Moldova. There are many political analysts and politicians who share the view that the continuation is this instability and the potential risks that another early Parliament elections could be held in the beginning of the next year (previous early elections were held in July 2009 and November 2010), would be a catastrophe for the country in terms of internal politics and European integration¹⁷. Certainly, if Moldova would receive a strong signal from the EU under the Polish presidency, this perspective could be discarded as no political party would risk losing this historical window of opportunity. On the other hand, the recent victory of the AEI’s candidate in the

¹⁵ <http://www.allmoldova.com/en/moldova-news/1249049975.html>

¹⁶ Sławomir Matuszak, Wojciech Konończuk, “The negotiations on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and Russia”, EaP Community, 18 April, 2011, <http://www.easternpartnership.org/community/debate/negotiations-eu-ukraine-association-agreement-and-russia>

¹⁷ Igor Boţan, « Forumul UE – Moldova » (in Romanian), 31 March, 2011, <http://www.e-democracy.md/monitoring/politics/comments/eu-moldova-forum/>; see also the interview (in Romanian) with Moldova’s Acting President, Marian Lupu, “Ajun de negocieri 5+2 - „Există un deficit de voinţă politică””, 13 June, 2011, <http://www.europalibera.org/content/article/24233015.html>

second tour of the mayoral elections (19 June), Dorin Chirtoacă, would diminish the PCRM's appetite for triggering new elections by blocking the election of the President in the Parliament. However, the Communists have gained the majority in the Municipal Council of Chişinău (if the recounting of the votes will not bring any significant changes), and there remains some potential for obstructionism from the PCRM. For sure, the political deadlock affect to some degree Moldova's potential for Europeanization, but certainly, there is no "catastrophe" here. Quite the contrary, the elections is that element that edifies Moldova's democratic culture, on the one hand, and attracts considerable attention from the West and EU in special, on the other hand. As a leading European expert on the ENP and Russia has correctly put it: "[...] *even though elections do not decide anything [...] they become a part of the democratic practice. They actually increase the attention to Moldova by the same EU and force Brussels to speak about the country as a potential land of success, and pushing it for further interaction*"¹⁸

II. External (structural) challenges for Moldova's Europeanization

While many experts are focused on the Southern dimension and treating it as the main external challenge to EaP in general and Moldova in particular (as discussed above), two other important issues are relatively neglected in the debates within the EaP expert community. The first one concerns the question of the *European project's* fate, and the second, the *uni-multipolarization* of the EU.

European Union: an uncertain future

One (superficial) way to get an idea of where the EU is headed to is to briefly read the media articles published on the issue¹⁹. Another way is to rely on the International Relations theories. But, as the space and scope do not permit to undertake here a serious analysis from this point of view, I will briefly outline only two theoretical perspectives. Even it does not refer directly to the topic of this paper; I consider that it is important to approach this question, simply because it affects our assessment of the future configuration on the European continent in general and in particular the prospects of the Eastern European region.

Currently, the most vivid debates over the EU's future could be observed between the Realists (pessimist) and Liberals (optimists or moderate optimists). Two prominent scholars could be distinguished, Sebastian Rosato (realist) and Andrew Moravcsik (liberal). In its recent article *Europe's Troubles. Power Politics and the State of the European Project*²⁰, he refreshes John Mearsheimer's old idea of "Europe back to the future" (even if criticises structural realist) and see the future of the EU in a very pessimistic light. Rosato departs

¹⁸ (author's translation from Russian) Arkady Moshes, "Tsena voproza", *Kommersant*, 8 June 2011, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1650488>

¹⁹ For a general picture look here, http://www.realclearworld.com/topic/around_the_world/eurozone/

²⁰ Sebastian Rosato, "Europe's Troubles. Power Politics and the State of the European Project", *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Spring 2011).

from the *balance of power* logic arguing that the entire European integration process is in large part the result of the European balancing behaviour in face of the Soviet Union's potential to dominate the continent during the Cold War. His idea is very simple, if European integration was generated by a particular configuration of power on the continent, where the Soviet Union was the threat that pushed Western Europeans toward integration, then with the disappearance of the USSR, the EU lacks any foundation for sustaining integration process. Integration process in the post-Cold War is largely seen as a failure and only the economic benefits maintained Europe united in the 90th. So now, there is no external power that could affect Europe as the Soviet Union did, thereby the economic crisis in Europe is causing the rise of the nationalistic sentiments. For Rosato, given the post-Cold War balance of power on the continent, the worse times lie ahead for the EU that "it is likely to look more like other international institutions, and less like the exceptional case that it seemed to be for so long."²¹

On the other hand, Andrew Moravcsik has argued from the beginning of crisis in the eurozone that this crisis will actually strengthen the European project. In his view, EU membership provides protection in the crisis times and that the Euro would ensure a higher profile in international financial affairs for EU members²². After one year, Moravcsik's vision has slightly changed, but he still remains confident of the EU future. He agrees with those who contend that the Euro is creating troubles for the less competitive countries and that Greece could eventually withdraw from the euro (as a last resort)²³. But he sustains that we are far from the end of the eurozone simply because there European states have real interests (egoistic) that work against the disintegration tendencies of a highly interdependent union. "*The European style of muddling through may be unglamorous, but it works. Those who bet against the economic self-interest of European governments are likely to lose.*"²⁴

It is difficult to draw some clear conclusion from these two perspectives briefly presented above. What I try to highlight here is the necessity of taking account of the IR theories and conduct deep analysis in order to test hypotheses concerning the EU integration and assess the most probable scenarios of EU evolution.

Uni-multipolarization of the EU and its effects on Moldova

Inspired by the IR theory, especially by the Huntingtonian concept of *uni-multipolarity*²⁵, in this part I will consider another issue concerning the actual power configuration in EU and possible effects on Moldova. The economic crisis and the "Arab spring" have revealed many vulnerabilities of the EU. While many analysts prefer to treat the EU as a "pole" in an "emerging multipolarity" on the global scale, these new circumstances have seriously affected the EU's "pole" image, indicating instead that we could actually witnessing the emergence of a *uni-multipolar* configuration within the EU. In a recent ECFR study, Mark Leonard and Ulrike Guerot observed that: "*Germany has had Europe's biggest economy since*

²¹ Ibid. p. 86.

²² Andrew Moravcsik, "Europe Defies the Skeptics. How crisis will make the EU stronger", *Newsweek*, 1 August 2009.

²³ Andrew Moravcsik, "In Defense of Europe. Now more than ever, it's not smart to bet on the EU's demise", *Newsweek*, 30 May 2010.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower", *Foreign Affairs*, Mar/Apr99, Vol. 78, Issue 2.

*integration began, but since the beginning of the euro crisis last year, there has been a kind of “unipolar moment” within the eurozone: no solution to the crisis was possible without Germany or against Germany.”*²⁶ That is a good observation. But considering the overall share of power and influence in the EU, this unipolar model does not resist. While it is reasonable to maintain Germany at the top, we should add at least three major powers in this picture: United Kingdom, France and Poland. Thus, we see that economic difficulties have pushed France and UK to sign unprecedented strategic documents in November last year. The Europeanization of this military rapprochement between these two countries looks at present problematic. Moreover, we see that the events in North Africa have exacerbated the differences between France and UK on the one side, and Germany on the other, with Berlin preferring to align itself to the BRIC countries on the Libyan issue in the UN Security Council. On the Eastern side, we observe important movements within the Visegrad Group countries announcing on 12 May the formation of a “battle group” under the command of Poland²⁷. Thus, we could establish that there is a sort of *uni-multipolarization* within the EU, seeing undergoing developments as a reversible process rather than a static power configuration as in the classic understanding of the polar theory.

If this hypothesis is accepted, then what implications does this EU *uni-multipolarization* have for Moldova? By definition a uni-multipolar system (as in the case of the global international system) implies the existence of one very powerful country that has the potential to influence any international issue that concerns its interests. Thus, a particular attention should be paid to its specific interests and ideas. The problem here is that it could pursue its ideas and interests irrespective of the opinion of some concerned countries. Certainly, some counterbalancing dynamic could be expected from other major players (in EU), but counterbalancing the leading country could be a risky (or an inefficient) business. Moreover, on some issues the major powers could share (a relatively) similar position.

The most important issue vis-à-vis Moldova is the Transnistrian conflict resolution. First, it should be noted that Germany confirmed its leading position in EU starting discussions with Moscow over the European security architecture and Transnistrian conflict resolution. Second, Berlin has managed to shape to a certain degree Moscow’s attitude toward Transnistria. Third, it managed to obtain the support of two major countries, France and Poland over this issue. Fourth, but recent developments of negotiations present some problematic aspects in respect with Moldova’s vital interests.

On 5 June, 2010 Germany and Russia signed the “Meseberg Memorandum”. This document proposed the creation of a Committee for Foreign and Security Affairs at a ministerial level between EU and Russia. One unofficial condition was Russia’s cooperative attitude on the Transnistrian issue. On 23 June Germany has included its dialogue with Russia within the framework of the “Weimar Triangle”. At that meeting of foreign affairs ministers of Germany, Paris, Poland and Russia, Sergey Lavrov agreed in principle with the transformation of the Russian “peace keeping mission” in Transnistria i.e. with the EU participation in that mission. Even if the EU remained reluctant to the “Meseberg Memorandum” proposition, the Transnistrian resolution process continued (and so the discussions over the EU – Russia Council). During a year, Russia has shown some positive signal as: stopping financial assistance to the Transnistrian illegal regime for a period;

²⁶ Ulrike Guérot and Mark Leonard, “The New German Question: How Europe can get the Germany it needs”, *ECFR Policy Brief*, April 2011.

²⁷ George Friedman, “Visegrad: A New European Military Force”, *RealClearWorld*, 17 May, 2011.

exerting constant pressures on its leadership; sustaining the Moldovan basic approach of a unitary state and territorial integrity (March 2011) in the eventual political resolution of the conflict and organizing a meeting on 21 June of all involved parties in the resolution process (5+2 format: Chisinau, Tiraspol, OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, USA and EU) in Moscow. There are good chances that the formal negotiations in the “5+2” format could resume in Moscow, and that would be an achievement in itself given the fact that official negotiations have been interrupted in March 2006 because Tiraspol (the capital of the separatist region) withdrew from the process (with Moscow support).

But in early June, Russian foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov changed the tone over Moldova’s principle of “unitary state”, pointing to the fact that there is no international support for this idea, as there is no support for the idea of an independent Transnistria. Lavrov has thus returned to Moscow’s old idea of a federal formula for the conflict resolution (the failed Kozak Memorandum, 2003) that in Moscow’s understanding would suppose a dysfunctional Moldovan state with Tiraspol’s veto power on Moldova’s foreign policy. It is worth noting here that in that period, Berlin issued a non-paper where the same position could be easily read²⁸. Despite these recent alarming signals for Moldova, at the time of writing of this paper it is hard to assess the real situation of that process. However, we could formulate two general possible evolutions for Moldova. First, if the new resolution plan prepared by Moscow and Berlin would retain the main features of the 2003 “Kozak plan”, then we could expect that Moldova will block the resolution process. Thus, in case of an eventual failure, Moldova could be alienated from the European Union (as a consequence of losing the support from Germany), or/and fall in isolation. Eventually, if Russia will manage to deliver some attractive incentives, Moldova could slip toward Russia. Second possibility, in case if Moldova will accept a federalization formula (supposing that it is a restarted “Kozak plan”), then this will put an end to the Transnistrian conflict, and Germany will accomplish its objective showing that Moscow could be a reliable partner in European affairs, thus accelerating their relationships. But this sort of resolution will create a new dysfunctional Moldova state with a strong Transnistrian (Moscow) voice in its internal and external affairs able to hamper Moldova’s European path. Moreover, reintegrating the Transnistrian region will request enormous resources, energy and time, thus distracting Moldova from Europeanization.

²⁸ Vladimir Socor, “German Diplomacy Tilts Toward Russia On Transnistria Negotiations”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Volume: 8 Issue: 108, 6 June, 2011.