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QUO VADIS, MOLDOVA? Veaceslav Berbeca

The year 2019 proved to be full of political events that generated hope but also confused the citizens of the Republic of Moldova and international observers. The formation of the situational coalition in June between the ACUM bloc and the PSRM signaled the beginning of some changes in the administration of state affairs. Attentive observers of the political processes were somewhat circumspect about the possibility of sincere collaboration between the two parties. However, few would have expected the honeymoon to stop suddenly, without creating the conditions for irreversible changes. Such political maneuvers affecting the welfare of the citizens inoculate even more deeply to the public opinion the idea that Moldovan politicians are incurable and incorrigible when it comes to promoting political and economic reforms.

The intention deserves attention. The resignation of the government led by Maia Sandu after losing a no-confidence vote puts the Republic of Moldova back into the same position where it was six months ago - in an area of obscurity and of group interests. The seriousness of the problem is accentuated by the fact that the resignation of this government came after a period of detention in Moldova's relations with the EU. The European officials gave our local political class another chance and believed in their promise to bring about the long-awaited change in the Republic of Moldova. Unfortunately, the western world has already become accustomed to the fact proven by the latest events on the political events that the Moldovan politicians should, for the most part, be treated with maximum responsibility, since they do not respect their commitments.

Following the Eastern Partnership's "success story", the European Union froze budget support and macro-financial assistance for the Republic of Moldova. Bilateral relations have deteriorated due to failures to prevent and combat corruption and as a result of the gross violation of democratic principles through the cancellation of the results of local elections in Chisinau, in 2018. The continuation of the reforms - especially in the judiciary sector - is the main condition on which depends the relations of the current government with the EU and the Western world.

Whatever the attitude of the dismissed government, it cannot be blamed for the lack of willingness to bring about important reforms in several state sectors. The EU's attitude towards the government of Maia Sandu can also be illustrated by the creation of the Project Team Moldova working group within the European Commission with the goal of making the European assistance more efficient. It is an instrument intended to accelerate the decision-making process necessary in order to provide the support needed by the Moldovan authorities for the implementation of reforms. However, the political and financial support provided by the EU is strictly conditioned by the implementation of reforms, in particular in the justice sector.

The change of power in June 2019 had us talking about the revival of the process of the European integration of the Republic of Moldova. The government managed in a very short period to unblock Moldova's relations with the European Union. From the appointment of the Sandu Government in June to its dismissal in early October, the EU has provided financial support in the form of budgetary assistance and macro-financial assistance equal to almost EUR 83 million. Only one quarter, ie EUR 20 million of this amount was provided in the form of credits.

Relations with the neighbors a mission difficult to accomplish. Good relations with external partners are a fundamental goal of every ruling party or coalition of ruling parties. But whoever believes that such relationships are easy to build, starts on the wrong track. The current government has started the administration of state affairs with the mission of overcoming a number of problems. The current government has from the beginning a handicap difficult to overcome in relation to both our neighbors - Romania and Ukraine, and with the EU.

First of all, it must overcome the feeling of mistrust and circumspection that results from the fact that it was being put in the place of a government committed to reforms. The first impression is that the current government will not be able to overcome one of the main shortages of our society, which is to imitate Western institutions without implementing their standards. That is, we import European institutions, but we continue to apply informal tools that promote corruption and clientelism. The principle of conditionality remains the defining element for our relations with the European Union. The statement of the candidate for the post of European Commissioner for Enlargement, Oliver Varhelyi, that EU financial assistance to Moldova will be suspended if the country's reforms are not continued, confirms this thesis. The EU will not stop supporting the Republic of Moldova after the change of government, but any deviation from the established commitments will be taxed through the suspension of the political and financial support.

Secondly, Moldovan politicians are accustomed to making declarations or actions for internal use, but which, however, are totally uninspired in relation to the states or foreign persons concerned. Such uninspired and free statements can be forgotten or overlooked by those concerned, i.e. the voters of one party, but are not forgotten by the targeted foreign partners targeted by such accusations. On the contrary, these actions are introduced in certain "registers " or, let's call them, institutional memories. The problem is even greater because these uninspired statements or actions targeted the EU, Romania and Ukraine, i.e. our main development partners and the only two neighboring states. Serious is also the fact that some members of the Government permitted themselves to make unfounded statements. The prime minister, Ion Chicu, accused the EU representatives of being guilty of the theft on the billion through supporting corrupt governments. Even if he later deleted this message from a social network, it will be very difficult for him to build relations with the EU based on trust. Among the targeted individuals is an EU representative who is from Germany - one of the most influential states in the EU.

Defense Minister Victor Gaiciuc allowed himself to speak in praise of the paramilitary groups in Donbas, highlighting the "heroism and high spirits" of the separatists in their fight against the Ukrainian army. It is practically impossible to hope that the Ukrainian state will overlook these statements and that the bilateral relations will not be affected.

Similarly, the totally uninspired and defiant gesture of the Socialist MP who reaped apart the map of Romania in the plenary of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova cannot be forgotten. The string of examples of xenophobic statements issued by socialists against Romanians is long and can be continued. Romania has expressed, from the very beginning, a reserved attitude towards any coalition which included the socialists. The situation will be even more complicated now that the socialists totally control the executive.

Thirdly, the members of the Government, hostages of their pro-Russian policies and preferences, made the first official visit to Russia. Whatever the explanations of Chicu, including the request not to speculate on the subject of his first trip, the current government has given a clear signal in the country and abroad in terms of foreign policy issues. Whoever had to understand, understood this maneuver in the spirit of the balanced foreign policy announced by Igor Dodon.

Everything for a new presidential mandate. Based on the statements made by the current Government, we understand that the executive's mandate is to ensure Igor Dodon obtains a new term at the next year's presidential elections. Ion Chicu was sent to seek money to build the foundation of the political ambitions of the current president's. The announced instrument is to turn the Republic of Moldova into a construction site, borrowing about \$ 500 million from Russia and other sums from elsewhere. Considering the fact that Igor Dodon has already concentrated too much power in his hands (the prosecutor is missing, and he has a majority in Parliament), and that he owns several televisions and would like to control the judiciary, opposing also the appointment of an independent prosecutor, the Republic of Moldova risks to further slip into the area of obscurity and uncertainty under the vigilant patronage of the Russian Federation. This conclusion is supported by the political stance assumed by Igor Dodon, especially during his office as a president, and which makes us believe that he is not the right man in the right place in order to promote the reforms and changes expected by the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.