

Shifting Colours: Moldova's Two Administrations

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Main Points

- Since the 1991 revolution, Moldova has been having conflicting parties and governments that favour either europeanisation or closer ties with Russia.
- Igor Dodon, previous president of Moldova, had valued closer ties with Russia across his whole mandate.
- Yet, after Dodon's defeat in the 2020 Presidential Election, Moldova will see a return to warming ties with the EU, but not without difficulties domestically.

Introduction

The Moldovan Revolution was originally enabled by Gorbachev's "perestroika and glasnost" policies, pushing the nationalist organisation "Popular Front of Moldova" to stage a massive public gathering that would pressure the incumbent Soviet government to enact a law where the official language of Moldova was a derivative of Romanian and demanding a return to the Latin script.¹ After a period of civil unrest, and with its first elections in 1990, the state declared independence on the 27th of August, 1991.² **After doing so, Moldova also became one of the signatories for the foundation of the "Commonwealth of Independent States", which promotes the cooperation of the ex-soviet states on social, political, economic, and military matters.**³ However, throughout the decades, Moldova still has faced significant divisions towards which sphere of influence should it drift: with the Party of Socialist Republic of Moldova (PSRM, led by Igor Dodon) offering a pro-Russian agenda, or the NOW Platform (jointly led by Adrian Năstase and Maia Sandu) offering a pro-European one. This article will provide a comparative review between the pro-Russian and pro-EU leaderships, offering a clearer understanding of the context through which Moldova has been operating internationally, and how these define the shifting approaches the government takes in dealing with the problems facing the state.

¹ Agerpres, (2020) "Revoluție 30: Caderea Comunismului în Republica Moldova", Available at: <https://www.agerpres.ro/documentare/2020/08/27/revoluție-30-caderea-comunismului-in-republica-moldova--562799> [in Romanian]

² Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, (1991) "Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova", Available at: <http://www.presedinte.md/declaration>

³ Embassy of Republic of Moldova at the Republic of Belarus, (2020) "Despre CSI" Available at: <https://belarus.mfa.gov.md/ro/content/despre-csi> [in Romanian]

Yet, aside from economic and corruption challenges, the country is also faced with the Transnistria conflict. As a background, in 1924, the USSR established the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) with the capital in Tiraspol as an answer to the possible unification between Romania and Moldova, and Romania would be required to cede Bessarabia to the USSR as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. During the fall of communism, many in the Transnistrian region feared that unification with Romania would be imminent. These tensions were increasing when a newly-independent Moldova rejected the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1940, rendering all of the terms (including that of the creation of the MASSR) to be null and void.⁴ As the opposition was rising against the perceived trends of unification from the numerous Russian-speaking demographic, be it fear of discrimination or otherwise, many protests would develop into a secessionist movement, with some of the first conflicts breaking out in 1990.⁵ With the support of the Russian 14th Army,⁶ Transnistria managed to maintain its integrity across what would soon become a war, ultimately reaching a ceasefire in 1992 that remains effective to this day; but no final resolution was reached over the conflict.⁷ **In 2015, the region's majority is constituted by Russians and followed by Moldovans, further emphasising the demographic's grip on the region.**⁸ Transnistria remains one of the recognised 'frozen conflicts' in the Black Sea region.

The Moldovan Constitutional Crisis of 2019

A relevant and important insight into the Moldovan domestic politics, and their influence on foreign policy, can be observed in a case study focused on the 2019 Moldovan Constitutional Crisis. The legislative elections on February of that year resulted in the PSRM gaining 35 seats, Democrats (PDM) received 30 seats and NOW winning 26 seats out of 101, resulting in the need for a coalition government. The constitution demands that a government

⁴ Parliament of Moldova, Declaration of Independence, Online

⁵ Hare P., Estrin S., Batt J., "Reconstituting the Market: The Political Economy of Microeconomic Transformation" (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999) p. 369-370

⁶ Dailey E., "War or Peace?: Human Rights and Russian Military Involvement in the "Near Abroad"", Washington DC: Human Rights Watch, 1993, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/1993/12/01/war-or-peace/human-rights-and-russian-military-involvement-near-abroad>

⁷ United Nations Security Council, (1992) "Agreement on the Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Armed Conflict in the Dniester Region of the Republic of Moldova", Available at: <https://peacemaker.un.org/moldova-peacefullsettlementdniestr92>

⁸ Ministry of Economic Development, (2017) "Statistical Yearbook 2017", Available at: <http://mer.gospmr.org/gosudarstvennaya-sluzhba-statistiki/informacziya/ezhegodnik-gosudarstvennoj-sluzhby-statistiki/statisticheskij-ezhegodnik-2017.html> [in Russian]

be formed in three months after the validation, or else the president must dissolve it.⁹ The Constitutional Court interpreted this as a “90 day” countdown starting at the end of the previous government’s mandate (which was PDM) and on the day the Parliament was validated (March 9); not 92 days which is the sum of the following three months.¹⁰ On the 91st day, a coalition between the pro-EU and the pro-Russian parties was formed where Maia Sandu would be Prime Minister, and Zinaida Greceanii (from PSRM) would be Speaker of the House. With the absence of the democratic party from the coalition, PDM called for the Constitutional Court to dismiss President Igor Dodon for failing to dissolve the parliament after the Court’s 90-day deadline, with the Court ultimately suspending Dodon and delegitimising the Sandu Cabinet.¹¹ **This would be the sixth time Dodon would be suspended; with the previous one being due to the refusal to sign into law the delegation of a stadium’s land for the new US embassy, and other pro-Western bills;**¹² while other ones were due to refusal to make various ministerial appointments. In turn, a democrat named Pavel Filip becomes the interim president and called for snap elections.¹³ Days later, he resigned.¹⁴ As a result of all of this, the entire election’s result was nulled and the process restarted. This sparked outrage from both inside and outside Moldova, such as the Russian Foreign Minister calling the process “criminal”¹⁵ and Putin supporting Dodon, calling his opponents ‘usurpers’,¹⁶ as well as angering the EU¹⁷ and the US,¹⁸ with all supporting the validity of the election. Ultimately, the Constitutional

⁹ Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, (2016), “Constituția Republicii Moldova” Available at: <http://www.parlament.md/CadrulLegal/Constitution/tabid/151/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx> [in Romanian]

¹⁰ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova, (2019), “Decizii de Inadmisibilitate”, Available at: <https://www.constcourt.md/ccdocview.php?tip=decizii&docid=663&l=ro> [in Romanian]

¹¹ Madalin N., (2019) “Moldova Faces Turmoil as Court Outlaws New Govt”, Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/09/moldova-faces-turmoil-as-court-outlaws-new-govt/>

¹² Radio Free Europe, (2018) “Moldovan Constitutional Court Suspends President For Fifth Time”, Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-court-dodon-suspended/29649228.html>

¹³ BBC, (2019) “Moldova crisis: Snap elections called by interim president”, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-48572304>

¹⁴ Radio Free Europe, (2019) “Moldova’s Democratic Party Government Resigns”, Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldovan-filip-cabinet-resigns/29999812.html>

¹⁵ Tass, (2019) “Moldova’s foreign policy must be defined by will of its people - Russian Deputy PM”, Available at: <https://tass.com/politics/1062896>

¹⁶ The Moscow Times, (2019), “Putin Vows to Back Moldovan President in Fight Against ‘Usurpers’”, Available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/06/13/putin-vows-to-back-moldovan-president-fight-against-usurpers-a65977>

¹⁷ Thorbjørn Jagland, (2019), “Statement of the Secretary General on the situation in the Republic of Moldova and the Venice Commission” Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/statement-by-the-spokesperson-of-the-secretary-general-on-the-situation-in-moldova>

¹⁸ US Department of State, (2019) “Moldovan Elections”, Available at: <https://www.state.gov/moldovan-elections/>

Court revised its course, rejecting all the decisions made that are connected to this crisis, and resigned entirely.¹⁹

The intensity of the political battles waged by the three parties can easily be observed here, with each party using any means at its disposal to gain more political power even if this means sparking a crisis. The geopolitical interests of each party have also attracted the attention of foreign powers, each having an interest in supporting their relevant movement; in this case, Russia supporting Dodon's PSRM and the West supporting, perhaps more tacitly, the NOW Platform; both supported the new coalition that was bound to break as a result of the crisis. The associations made with regards to these parties are stark enough that, in some sense, elections become a form of deciding whether Moldova should be closer to EU or Russia,²⁰ and both sides stand to gain from their results.

In 2020, the Moldovan electorate has voted pro-EU candidate Maia Sandu to be the next president, defeating PSRM's Igor Dodon and putting Moldova back on track for europeanisation.²¹ **But to state that this will automatically result in Moldova's closer ties with the EU is impetuous. It is worth underlining that the state's Constitution offers limited power for the President of Moldova.** Within it, the President is stated to be allowed to undertake negotiations and conclude international agreements for them to be ratified in Parliament.²² With a hung parliament where most seats are controlled by pro-Russian PSRM, that is still under Dodon's leadership, President Sandu may face difficulties in enacting her anti-corruption platform and ensuring closer europeanisation, if the parliament rejects various pro-EU agreements. Thus, efforts can certainly be made, but solidifying these efforts will be harder in the context laid above. Nevertheless, a comparative review of both administrations will be taken to grasp the efforts made by Moldova over the last years in shifting pursuits for a life closer to the Russian or Western spheres of influence.

¹⁹ Radio Free Europe, (2019) "Moldova's Entire Constitutional Court Resigns", Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-s-entire-constitutional-court-resigns/30022221.html>

²⁰ Gillet K., (2019) "A Global Geopolitical Crisis Comes to Moldova", Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/02/moldova-elections-voters-europe-russia/583351/>

²¹ DW News, (2020), "Moldova election: Pro-EU Maia Sandu wins presidency", Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/moldova-election-pro-eu-maia-sandu-wins-presidency/a-55611249>

²² Presidency of the Republic of Moldova, (2016) "Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, Title III: Public Authorities" Available at: <https://www.presedinte.md/eng/titul3>

The Dodon Administration: 2016 - 2020

Igor Dodon, who is the president of the Socialist party, became Moldova's president as a result of the second round of the 2016 election, which was the first direct presidential election following a decision by the Constitutional Court that denied Parliament from electing the state's president.²³ During the campaign, which had Maia Sandu as the contender for the position, **Dodon ran a platform that centred on a more conservative lifestyle and closer relations with Russia.**²⁴ **He also benefitted from the backing of Russia, as well as Vladimir Plahotniuc's (chairman of the PDM at the time), the Moldovan Orthodox Church's and Patriarch Krill's.**²⁵ All these elements were key to his success, as the backing of Russia prompted the Russian-speaking demographic to support him further, while the Church attacked Sandu's fitness for office, and Plahotniuc's connections into mass media gave Dodon an unrivalled avenue to propagate his message.²⁶ After he won the 2016 election, he was required to relinquish the PSRM position to interim leader Zinaida Greceanîi during his mandate,²⁷ only to take it back after he lost in 2020.²⁸

He is perceived to be pro-Russian and generally favours closer ties to the Russian Federation, as exemplified, among other pieces of evidence, by his declarations of re-establishing a strategic and friendly agreement with the Kremlin, focused on economic cooperation and collaboration over the Transnistrian issue.²⁹ Furthermore, during the campaign in October 2016, he declared his support for the annexation of Crimea, answering that the peninsula belongs to the Russian Federation.³⁰ This was eventually followed by a pledge that he will foster closer relationships with Romania and Ukraine, however, Ukraine

²³ Popșoi M., (2016) "Controversial Ruling by Moldova's Constitutional Court Reintroduces Direct Presidential Elections", Available at: <https://moldovanpolitics.com/2016/03/09/controversial-ruling-by-moldovas-constitutional-court-reintroduces-direct-presidential-elections/>

²⁴ Popșoi M., (2016) "Moldova Torn Between Past and Future Ahead of Presidential Run-offs", Available at: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/11/moldova-torn-past-future-ahead-presidential-run-offs/>

²⁵ Popșoi, Moldova Torn Between Past and Future, Online

²⁶ Popșoi M., (2016) "Why Did a Pro-Russian Candidate Win the Presidency in Moldova?", Available at: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/11/pro-russian-candidate-win-presidency-moldova/>

²⁷ Ceban I., (2016) "(video) Decis! Igor Dodon nu mai este președinte al PSRM. Zinaida Greceanîi va deține interimatul" Available at: <https://unimedia.info/stiri/video-decis-igor-dodon-nu-mai-este-presedinte-al-psrm--zinaida-greceanii-va-detine-interimatul-123522.html> [in Romanian]

²⁸ Tass, (2020) "Dodon says he will visit Russia as leader of Moldova's largest political party", Available at: <https://tass.com/world/1225649>

²⁹ Igor D., (2016) "Programul electoral al candidatului PSRM Igor Dodon la alegerile prezidențiale din 2016", Available at: http://alegeri.md/w/Programul_electoral_al_candidatului_PSRM_Igor_Dodon_la_alegerile_preziden%C8%9Biale_din_2016

³⁰ Unian Information Agency, (2016) "Moldovan presidential race leader says Crimea "Russian"" Available at: <https://www.unian.info/politics/1588871-moldovan-presidential-race-leader-says-crimea-russian.html>

rejected that possibility due to these statements on Crimea.³¹ Moreover, when interviewed, he claims to identify himself as “pro-Moldovan” rather than “pro-Russian” or “pro-European”, despite adding that his country requires a “patriot like Putin”³². During Moldova’s Constitutional Crisis, Dodon benefitted from President Putin’s personal support during his suspension.³³ **And in 2020, he declared that he would rather take the ‘Sputnik V’ COVID-19 since he “does not trust Western vaccines”.**³⁴ Finally, from over 70 visits he has made, around half of them were to the Russian Federation alone.³⁵

His stance on the European Union is not favourable either. In an Euronews interview, Dodon has expressed support for a stronger Europe “from Lisbon to Vladivostok”, asserting that Russia would play an important role in empowering Europe (not the European Union, which he corrected himself from saying).³⁶ He claimed to welcome an initiative of Russia to start the removal of both the 20,000 tons of Soviet munitions depot there and the Russian forces stationed in Transnistria and that there is no military base of an occupational nature.³⁷ **He continued in the same interview by stating that the EU is not ready to continue politics of enlargement and that the bloc needs to come up with “some fresh ideas” in the face of growing divisions, ultimately asserting that Moldova does not see itself as a member any time soon.**³⁸

Beyond the interview, Dodon has also invited a North Korean delegation to his country, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the country’s socialist party, which sparked an outrage from both Moldova’s vice-president of the Parliament, Iulie Leancă, as well as from some European officials.³⁹ In this visit, Dodon emphasised the importance of establishing

³¹ Unian Information Agency, (2016) “Ukrainian Envoy to Moldova tells why President Dodon’s visit not expected in Kyiv”, Available at: <https://www.unian.info/politics/amp-2158414-ukrainian-envoy-to-moldova-tells-why-president-dodons-visit-not-expected-in-kyiv.html>

³² Filatova I., Rescheto J., (2018), “President Igor Dodon: Moldova needs a ‘patriot’ like Putin”, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/president-igor-dodon-moldova-needs-a-patriot-like-putin/a-42745175>

³³ Radio Free Europe, (2019) “Putin Supports Moldova’s President Amid Political Crisis”, Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-says-moscow-won-t-drop-support-for-moldovan-president-amid-dispute/29997182.html>

³⁴ Tass, (2020) “‘I don’t trust Western vaccines’: Ex-Moldovan leader set for Russia’s Sputnik V jab only”, Available at: <https://tass.com/world/1240413>

³⁵ Necsutu M., (2020) “In a divided Moldova, President Igor Dodon fights for four more years”, Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/10/01/in-a-divided-moldova-president-igor-dodon-fights-for-four-more-years>

³⁶ Crowfort O., (2020) “Moldova at a crossroads: Igor Dodon on Russia and the future of Europe”, Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/02/19/moldova-at-a-crossroads-igor-dodon-on-russia-and-the-future-of-europe>

³⁷ Crowfort, Moldova at a crossroads, Online

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Touma A. M., (2017), “Moldova President Criticised for Welcoming North Koreans”, Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/07/03/dodon-say-moldova-to-export-wine-to-north-korea-07-03-2017/>

commercial ties, especially highlighting the exports of wine and agricultural goods, between the two nations, and that an “efficient dialogue” should be established despite resistance from their western counterparts.⁴⁰ It is worth noticing that Dodon also pursued closer ties with Russia to promote stronger commercial ties between the two after an embargo on the product was imposed by Russia in 2006 and once again in 2013 as a result of the europeanisation Moldova experienced from previous administrations.⁴¹ Ironically, the embargo made Moldovan producers orient towards the EU market instead, emphasizing Dodon’s focus on warming up to Russia despite economic circumstances.⁴² **Dodon’s euroskepticism extends further at the expense of closer ties with the EU, by stating that he considers scrapping the Association Agreement with the bloc, despite this resulting in many Moldovan officials resisting the decision.**⁴³ Overall, Dodon’s image as a pro-Russian politician is only backed by his actions focused on closer ties with Russia while distancing himself from the EU, despite the previous governments’ efforts, and resistance in Parliament, over many of his decisions.

However, Dodon’s stance on finding a solution for the Transnistrian conflict needs to be taken into account as well. During his campaign, Dodon is perceived to have shifting stances on Transnistria, with none supporting the region’s independence. In a statement, he once clarified the position as Transnistria having a choice to either unify with Moldova or Ukraine and “nobody else”.⁴⁴ Yet, perceived as supportive of the proposal offered by the 2003 Kozak Memorandum, which suggested Moldova to federalise with an autonomous Transnistria that benefitted from veto powers, including on areas such as foreign policy.⁴⁵ It would also permit the deployment of Russian forces in the country, potentially by virtue of Transnistria’s return to Moldova as part of a federation, and thus Russia would take major steps in ensuring the region is not drifting to the EU anymore. It would also force Russian to become an official language of the Republic of Moldova, while Romanian remains part of the state language as

⁴⁰ Touma, Welcoming North Koreans, Online

⁴¹ Reuters, (2013) “Russia, unhappy with Moldova's EU drive, bans its wine and spirits”, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-moldova-russia-wine/russia-unhappy-with-moldovas-eu-drive-bans-its-wine-and-spirits-idUSBRE98916M20130910>

⁴² Necsutu M., (2020) “Moldova Hits New Records in Wine Exports”, Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/28/moldova-hits-new-records-in-wine-exports/>

⁴³ Dymkin D., (2017) “In Russia, Moldovan president says he may scrap EU trade pact”, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-moldova-eu/in-russia-moldovan-president-says-he-may-scrap-eu-trade-pact-idUSKBN151290>

⁴⁴ Vlas C., (2017) “Igor Dodon: Reintegration of the country would start in 2019-2020”, Available at: <https://www.moldova.org/en/igor-dodon-reintegration-country-start-2019-2020/>

⁴⁵ Calus K., (2014) “Power politics on the outskirts of the EU: why Transnistria matters” Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsee/2014/06/19/transnistria-power-politics/>

a whole, a contending issue that started the conflict in the first place.⁴⁶ **While this would appease the Transnistrian side, it would essentially lock Moldova closer to Russia.** The Memorandum was met with stark resistance from the population, European officials, Romania and Moldova’s own parliament, which enacted a law in 2005 that regulates the region as an integral part of the Republic of Moldova, not as a federation; adding a legal roadblock to the minimal chances of ratifying this memorandum.⁴⁷ **However, regardless of his stance, when he and Transnistria’s leader, Vadim Krasnoselsky, met in July 2020, Dodon addressed him with the title of “president”,⁴⁸ assisting the legitimisation of the region.** Due to the region’s historical closeness to Russia, and Dodon’s backing from the Kremlin, the opportunity to bus voters from the region to vote in his favour was exploited both in 2016 and 2019, and that was feared of happening in 2020 as well, underlining a political interest in giving leeway to Transnistria.⁴⁹

The Sandu Administration: From 2020

Maia Sandu, joint leader of the pro-EU NOW Platform, has defeated Igor Dodon in the 2020 presidential election following a platform that is based on “maximum vigilance” against ongoing corruption.⁵⁰ Before running for the presidency, she was briefly the Prime Minister of Moldova, taking office after striking a deal with the PSRM where Sandu would establish a government and the House of Representatives Speaker would be from the socialist party. Following the Moldovan Constitutional Crisis of 2019, she was able to remain in power until November 2019, when her cabinet was ousted as a result of a PSRM-led no-confidence vote in the parliament.⁵¹ Her ousting would not have been possible without the

⁴⁶ Kozak D. (2003) “Russian Draft Memorandum on the Basic Principles of the State Structure of a United State in Moldova”, Available at: <https://regnum.ru/news/458547.html> [in Russian]

⁴⁷ Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, (2005) “Lege nr. 173 din 22.07.2005 cu privire la prevederile de bază ale statutului juridic al localitatilor din stînga Nistrului (Transnistria)”, Available at: <http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=313004&lang=1> [in Romanian]

⁴⁸ Necstutu M., (2020) “Moldova’s Pro-Russian President in Play for Rebel Region Votes”, Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/08/28/moldovas-pro-russian-president-in-play-for-rebel-region-votes/>

⁴⁹ Necstutu M., (2020) “Fearing voter fraud, Moldova’s war veterans spend election day on Transnistria border”, Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/11/15/fearing-voter-fraud-moldova-s-war-veterans-spend-election-day-on-transnistria-border>

⁵⁰ BBC, (2020) “Moldova election: Pro-EU candidate Maia Sandu wins presidency”, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-54942847>

⁵¹ Digi24, (2019) “Guvernul Maia Sandu a căzut la moțiunea de cenzură depusă de pro-ruși. Proteste în fața Parlamentului”, Available at: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/mapamond/guvernul-maia-sandu-a-cazut-la-motiunea-de-cenzura-depusa-de-pro-rusii-de-la-psrm-1215628> [in Romanian]

support of the PDM, which gave the rest of their votes to reach over the half required. The reason for this was a proposal that she, as the Prime Minister, would have the authority to choose who would become the General-Prosecutor of the country,⁵² something only the President of Moldova can do.⁵³ As a result, she became a caretaker of the cabinet until she was elected president.

Being pro-European, she stands in opposition to Dodon's pro-Russian tendencies and seeks closer relations with the EU instead: declaring she wants to be a "president of European integration".⁵⁴ **One of the first declarations she has made after she was elected was to call the removal of the Russian armed forces stationed in Transnistria, stating that they should be replaced with civilian observers under the OSCE mandate, as opposed to the OGRF peacekeeping mandate.**⁵⁵ The speed with which Sandu made this declaration entrenches her in a position where she would embark on a more direct political confrontation with Russia, compared to her predecessor. This declaration was condemned only days later by the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, stating that the move would destabilise the region.⁵⁶

Despite Sandu's declarations that she seeks to boost the economy and balance relationships with both the Russian and EU side,⁵⁷ she has already damaged the prospects of this possibility of such balance. Inversely, this is the same rhetoric that Dodon had in the past, where he too declared to seek a balanced foreign policy⁵⁸ with it only to be skewed towards Russia further. **With Maia Sandu as president, the europeanisation of Moldova ought to continue, with the country receiving from its EU neighbour, Romania, 200,000 of the Pfizer-BioNtech manufactured COVID-19 vaccine** and experts to help arrange the

⁵² Government of the Republic of Moldova, (2019) "Premierul Maia Sandu a prezentat proiectul pentru modificarea Legii Procuraturii în Parlament", Available at: <https://gov.md/ro/content/premierul-maia-sandu-prezentat-proiectul-pentru-modificarea-legii-procuraturii-parlament> [in Romanian]

⁵³ General-Prosecutor of Republic of Moldova, (2019) "Leadership of the Prosecutor" Available at: <http://www.procuratura.md/md/infoproc/> [in Romanian]

⁵⁴ Calugareanu V., Gluschko A, (2020) "Moldova's Maia Sandu: I want to be the president of European integration", Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/moldovas-maia-sandu-i-want-to-be-the-president-of-european-integration/a-56089364>

⁵⁵ BBC, (2020) "Moldova's new president calls for Russian troops to withdraw from territory", Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55135213>

⁵⁶ The Moscow Times, (2020) "Pull Russian Troops Out of Moldova, New President Says", Available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/11/30/pull-russian-troops-out-of-moldova-new-president-says-a72184>

⁵⁷ Radio Free Europe, (2020) "Moldova's Pro-EU Election Winner Vows To Balance Ties Between West, Russia", Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-pro-eu-election-winner-vows-to-balance-ties-between-west-russia/30952029.html>

⁵⁸ Presidency of Republic of Moldova, (2019) "Președintele țării a avut o întrevvedere de lucru cu noul ministru al Afacerilor Externe și Integrării Europene", Available at: <http://presedinte.md/rom/comunicate-de-presa/presedintele-tarii-a-avut-o-intrevvedere-de-lucru-cu-noul-ministru-al-afacerilor-externe-si-integrarii-europene> [in Romanian]

vaccination strategy, an extension of the non-reimbursable grand of €100,000,000 and other economic agreements that act as part of Moldova's development.⁵⁹ Romania's President Iohannis was also the first to be invited to Moldova days after Ms. Sandu's inauguration, where he made these pledges.⁶⁰ Comparatively, Romania experienced a colder relationship with Moldova under Dodon, who never visited Bucharest. He was recorded stating that Romania had secret missions of stirring of unification and called those who support such intentions a public enemy;⁶¹ with one of the only meetings the two leaders had was at the UN in 2019, where Romania expressed its opposition against the federalisation of Moldova under the Kozak Memorandum.⁶² **In addition, Moldova signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the UK, deepening its connections with the western world.**⁶³ President Sandu also held bilateral negotiations with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky,⁶⁴ whereas before Dodon was not invited to Kyiv over his statements regarding Crimea. Considering that this is the start of the Sandu administration, it is possible Moldova may pursue more diplomatic efforts to increase their ties with various pro-Western neighbours and states. However, she may encounter various difficulties in Parliament, perhaps not due to the europeanisation alone, but rather due to her efforts to fight corruption altogether. As it was previously exemplified: Sandu lost her position as prime minister over the previous anti-corruption pushes because of the same majority party. The lessons learned from that experience may assist her in avoiding a similar fate or suspension as Dodon had.

⁵⁹ Chirileasa A., (2020) "Romania's president promises more help for Moldova, including 200,000 doses of anti-COVID vaccine", Available at: <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-president-visit-moldova-support-december-2020>

⁶⁰ Radio Free Europe, (2020) "Romania, Moldova's New President Vow Fresh Start After Pro-Russia Leader's Exit" Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/31025937.html>

⁶¹ Ursu V., (2018) "Igor Dodon: „Există riscul major ca dușmanul numărul unu al R. Moldova, al moldovenilor, să fie românii!” (III)" Available at: <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/valentina-ursu-in-dialog-cu-igor-dodon-partea-a-treia/29109939.html> [in Romanian]

⁶² Necsutu M., (2019) "Romania Opposes Federal Solution to Moldova's Transnistria Problem", Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/09/26/romania-opposes-federal-solution-to-moldovas-transnistria-problem/>

⁶³ Government of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, (2020) "UK and Moldova sign Strategic Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement" Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-moldova-sign-strategic-partnership-trade-and-cooperation-agreement>

⁶⁴ 112 Ukraine, (2021) "Zelensky, Sandu to sign number of bilateral documents during their upcoming talks", Available at: <https://112.international/politics/zelensky-sandu-to-sign-number-of-bilateral-documents-during-their-upcoming-talks-58012.html>

Conclusion

In conclusion, the two administrations offer a stark contrast to one another. The Dodon administration appeared to have a strong tendency towards rekindling its ties with Russia, which is the opposite previous administrations have done. **This has taken the form of making numerous visits to Moscow, as well as seeking to repeal or change the EU Association Agreement signed in 2013, declaring Crimea is Russia’s territory and being overall more engaging with the Russian Federation than with its Western counterparts.** It is also worth to mention that he stood to gain from Putin’s support in the previous elections, as he would be able to win more votes from the Russian-speaking ethnicities. **In comparison, the Sandu Administration has had similar tendencies but towards the West instead,** thawing relationships with its EU neighbour, declaring herself as a president of “European integration” and launching numerous efforts to befriend various states closer to EU than to Russia. In this regard, it should come as no surprise that these elections are seen as a type of nationwide decision-making process where the country chooses its orientation geopolitically. **Regardless, considering the political dynamics at play, one must remember that the difficulties facing the Sandu administration have only begun and that the rivalry and contrast between both Sandu and Dodon is not over; especially with Dodon continuing to remain in charge of the party that has a majority in the Moldovan Parliament.**

Recommendations for Western international community:

- President Sandu's clear push for further europeanisation is centred not just on an ideological premise, but on an economical one as well. In this light, states should leverage the Moldovan producer's exports into the European markets, combined with the upbeat diplomatic efforts to warm the ties, in order to strike more deals set to bolster Moldova's economic output further. In doing so, one will showcase both the legitimacy of a pro-EU administration, as well as encouraging the country to drift further towards the West.
- The Parliament of Moldova is hung and no party holds more than half the seats. Despite the outnumbering opposition, it is the PSRM holding the most seats bound to vote their way as exemplified by the previous vote of no confidence. It is possible that not only numerous major europeanisation agreements may face difficulty in being ratified, but acts to undermine her efforts may be at play. Without compromising the europeanisation efforts at the ratification process, the aforementioned recommendation should be made gradually, signalling the willingness to cooperate further. It must be remembered that the closer Moldova is to the EU, the more anger this will draw from Russia, and potentially from pro-Russian parties, both in parliament and potentially in Transnistria.
- Romania's support for Moldova's development, delivered after Sandu's inauguration, is one of the means through which the state may see itself closer to the EU than Russia. While the independence of Moldova is stated continuously, and thus unification is out of question, the continuing of support for the Republic under this administration will provide additional reasons to align itself geopolitically with its neighbour and the bloc.
- The issue of Transnistria remains peaceful at the moment, however little progress was done to establish a settlement over the issue. Considering the unpopularity of the Kozak Memorandum, the 5+2 negotiations led by the OSCE must intensify their diplomatic efforts towards finding a peace settlement to the conflict. However, given the historic and strategic interests Russia has in the region, as well as considering the conflicting stances of both Moldova and Transnistria have, finding peace settlement that would satisfy both parties would be subjected to a long and arduous process.

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