Veaceslav Berbeca

Moldova’s Foreign Policy Statewatch represents a series of brief analyses, written by local and foreign experts, dedicated to the most topical subjects related to the foreign policy of Moldova, major developments in the Black Sea Region, cooperation with international organizations and peace building activities in the region. It aims to create a common platform for discussion and to bring together experts, commentators, officials and diplomats who are concerned with the perspectives of European Integration of Moldova. It is also pertaining to offer to Moldova’s diplomats and analysts a valuable tribune for debating the most interesting and controversial points of view that could help Moldova to find its path to EU.

The Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are two states expressing their desire to join the European Union. The efforts of both states to rally to the European values have often been ambiguous and blurred. As a result, these two countries’ rank is probably, in the category of “lagging behind” states in terms of their chances to join the European Union. Otherwise, both neighboring states possibly represent the last potential candidates to join the European Union. But the date of joining is directly linked to economic and political performances of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.
What would a package approach mean?

Speaking about including the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine into the same package by the EU, we refer, hypothetically, to the fact that the two could appear on the candidates list to join the EU. For the time being neither of the two countries has been considered having this prospect. The notion of “package approach” implies conditionality between the states regarding the prospect of joining the EU. Otherwise speaking, the chances of a state to join depends on the economic, political or any other kind of performance of the other state that is the element of this approach.

The package approach implies advantages and risks as well for the states under discussion regarding such prospect. The advantage of this approach would be the competition between the states in order to carry out reforms necessary for EU membership. Otherwise the state that fails in implementing the reforms risks to be severely criticized. The package approach is also advantageous when an approximate date of the mentioned states joining the EU is known.

The risks of this approach are that the membership chances, by including several states in the package, depend on the achievements of implementing reforms in the candidate countries. The date of joining is directly linked to the promotion of reforms in the candidate states. The delay in implementing the European standards in a candidate state postpones the joining of all candidate states. When Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007 this fact was considered, at least at the discourse level, as a package approach of the EU towards these countries. From the European Council decision in December 1999 in Helsinki to start the joining negotiations with Romania and Bulgaria and till their membership on 1st January 2007 there was a real competition between these states, culminating in reproaches about the lack of efficient reforms. Bulgaria expressed its concerns that Romania’s poor results in many areas could impede the Bulgarian membership in the EU. Nowadays there are several candidate states for joining the EU (Turkey, Croatia, Macedonia and Iceland) without being included together into one package. This means that their chances to join depend solely on their own performances.

Moldova and Ukraine – separated or together?

The Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are two states with a practically identical background regarding the issue of European integration. Both states had swung for a while between East and West before declaring their intention to join the EU. However, many times, there was a lack of agreement between the European rhetoric and both states actions. Even though Ukraine made more progress in its relations with the EU, agreeing on an Association Agenda after a meeting of the EU – Ukraine Cooperation Council on 16 June 2009. Moreover, in Ukraine, despite a lengthy political crisis in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution of 2004, diverse bureaucratic enclaves in the most important ministries made efforts in order to implement internal reforms under the label
of European integration having the government political mandate to act this way. When the EU encouraged Belarus and Armenia to promote reforms it was actually asking them to be more like Ukraine. For some observers Ukraine, if we refer to Copenhagen criteria requiring the candidate state to be democratic, have a working market economy and respect the rights of minorities, is much more closer to the EU than it was some years ago.

The Republic of Moldova lags behind Ukraine in terms of negotiating a EU – Moldova Association Agreement, the discussions having only started in January 2010. This year several rounds of negotiations took place regarding the EU – Moldova Association Agreement, along with the visa liberalization talks. As a result, Gunnar Wiegand, Director for Eastern Europe in the framework of General Direction for foreign relations of European Commission stated in June this year in Chisinau that: “negotiations concerning the signing of the EU – Moldova Association Agreement are moving with an unprecedented speed.” The good results of the Republic of Moldova in relation to the EU have been confirmed by European experts who declared that within the EU Eastern Partnership, the Republic of Moldova became priority number one. Such a statement means that the Moldovan state could be regarded as a success model in terms of reforms for other countries within Eastern Partnership.

At the moment, both Moldova and Ukraine are, practically, at the same stage of building up their relations with the EU. However, these states are in many respects quite different and this thing could be an advantage or a disadvantage as well regarding their prospect to get closer to the EU. In the light of the latest changes in Moldova and Ukraine, diverse opinions are expressed regarding the opportunity to include into one package both states in order to join the EU.

There are a number of arguments that could explain the idea to decouple the Republic of Moldova from Ukraine. Firstly, Ukraine is involved in other projects that are incompatible with European integration. We refer to the European Economic Space (EES) whose members are the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. It stipulates the creation of conditions for a free movement of goods, capital, services and labour. Even if Ukraine’s role in this project is insignificant, the intention to leave this structure could raise negative reactions from the part of Moscow. According to some experts Ukrainian precedent, that changed its orientation vector after the last domestic elections and aims more and more to an economic integration with the Russian Federation, is thoroughly studied in European strategic centers and not only. Secondly, the Association Agreement negotiated with the EU does not imply the prospect of membership. Although there are voices in Europe that suggest bringing the EU closer to Ukraine it is quite uncertain that the chances to join the EU will be significantly changed in the near future. Thirdly, the chances of Ukraine (and those of Moldova as well) to join the EU in the near future are undermined by the “enlargement fatigue” in the aftermath of 2004 and 2007 enlargements. Ukraine, being a larger country, will be more difficult to digest than Moldova. Fourthly, Ukraine is a country whose population is divided, in terms of their aspiration, between West and East. A survey carried out by Aberystwyth University reveals that less than a half of the Ukrainian population...

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2 Andrew Wilson, *Dealing with Yanukovych’s Ukraine*, European Council of Foreign Affairs, www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/dealing_with_yanukovychs_ukraine_andrew_wilson
4 www.dw-world.de/de/article/0,,3665985,00.html
5 www.basarabeni.ro/stiri/integrare-europeana/republica-moldova-are-sanse-re-1491/
6 Idem
has a positive attitude towards the EU, while the vast majority of Moldova’s population pleads for closer relations with the EU.

There are, however, several arguments against the idea to decouple the Republic of Moldova from Ukraine. Firstly, this idea once expressed and intensely promoted in Chisinau could upset the administration in Kiev. And all these bearing in mind the fact that some years ago, being in a better situation than Moldova in terms of getting closer to the EU, Ukraine did not express such a proposal about Chisinau. The idea to decouple might have negative effects on Ukraine’s cooperation policy towards Transnistrian issue. Secondly, Moldova’s attempt to be treated separately from Ukraine could be risky in case Ukraine is advancing faster in getting closer to the EU. But, thanks to its geographical position, in case EU – Ukraine relations recorded progress, the Moldovan side will benefit anyway. In this respect, it is important for the two states to combine efforts in order to overcome internal problems and mutually assist each other in the process of joining the EU.

Conclusions

European officials and experts assessments confirm the idea that the Republic of Moldova is the regional leader in the race for membership. As a result, a number of opinions have been expressed regarding the inclusion of Moldova in the package of Western Balkans countries to join the EU. Romania president Traian Basescu was among the first to launch the idea of Moldova package inclusion together with Western Balkans countries in the process of EU integration. This idea is also backed up by Poland that might become the second EU member state to support this opinion. Sweden, on the contrary, suggested to realize all Eastern Partnership projects as a stage in preparing for integration and not to aspire towards Western Balkans package and thus to pursue an independent joining process even ahead of Balkan countries.

Chisinau administration will, probably, have to ponder over the possible options: to be or not to be included in one package with other countries, to join the Western Balkans bloc or to pursue an independent joining process even ahead of Balkan countries.

The main purpose of the Republic of Moldova is to pursue its internal reforms. The European integration implies an internal effort in order to tailor the Republic of Moldova standards and values to the European ones. This means that Chisinau administration has to continue to make visible efforts to adjust to the community acquis and to the European policies this being the safest way to join the EU.