

US Takes Control of Transdniestrian Settlement?

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Just a few days ago, Moldova's got a new government. Part of the Cabinet is well known and associated with particular political forces, but there are dark horses, which the general public almost does not know.

One of the mysteries of the new Cabinet is the Deputy Prime Minister for reintegration Alexandru Flenchea, who unexpectedly replaced the well-known Moldovan diplomat Vasile Sova. It was believed that Sova knows the Transdniestrian issue better than others, down to the most non-public details, and is well-versed in negotiations with Tiraspol. It is no coincidence that during just five months in the Sandu government, he was able to achieve free access of all Moldovan officials to the left bank, which hasn't happened for decades.

The oddities in the Sova's removal do not end there. It is known that he has long wanted to return to the track of the Transdniestrian settlement, for years emphasized his professionalism and actively engaged in dialogue with Tiraspol as an adviser to President Dodon. It seemed that in the team of the President, who so clearly prioritizes the Transdniestrian direction, there is simply no equivalent alternative to Vasile Sova. Nevertheless, he left the government.

The new Deputy Prime Minister Flenchea is the little-known character who obviously isn't in Igor Dodon's team and professes views absolutely opposite to patriarchal values of socialists. So, in 2018, Flenchea became involved in a public controversy with Dodon over the President's scandalous publication on gender equality. Then the current Deputy Prime

Minister wrote the following:

“President Igor Dodon, you owe an apology to the whole country. Because, there is no person whom you would not offend with your statements. When you call “gender equality” a false doctrine, you must explain how you are better than my wife or my mother”.

Attempts to understand the background of the new Deputy Prime Minister come across almost complete absence of his biography. At the end of November, Alexandru Flenchea will turn 40. He started his career in journalism, after which he joined the Ministry of Reintegration of Moldova under the leadership of Vasile Sova. A few years later Flenchea left the civil service and during a long time worked in foreign diplomatic missions.

In 2008, the future Deputy Prime Minister was appointed political adviser to the U.S. Embassy in Moldova on the Transdnistrian settlement, while studying at the U.S. Department of State’s Foreign Service Institute. In 2012, Flenchea became a political adviser in the OSCE Mission to Moldova, which is traditionally headed by American diplomats. Here he becomes the closest associate of the head of the mission, Michael Scanlan. And after some time Flenchea and Scanlan received state awards of the RM personally from Igor Dodon.

In 2018, the US in the Moldovan office of the OSCE was replaced by Germany, and Claus Neukirch became the head of the mission. Michael Scanlan left, and the future Deputy Prime Minister resigned from the OSCE after his chief. However with the Maia Sandu’s government the US returned to the Transdnistrian negotiations in a different capacity: Flenchea was appointed head of a subsidiary of the Bureau for Reintegration, and later got to the post of Vasile Sova.

According to Moldovan experts, Mr. Flenchea strongly supports the unity of the two banks of the Dniester, as he himself said

in an interview with an American radio station on September 2. At the same time, the experience of the Deputy Prime Minister hints that he associates hopes for the unification of the country with the support of American partners.

The only thing that is really unclear in this strange story is Igor Dodon's motives. In fact, the President literally forcibly 'returned' Vasile Sova to his administration and vacated the strategic chair of the Deputy Prime Minister for reintegration for an absolutely disloyal person. Only a request comes to mind, which the Moldovan President found difficult to refuse. It came clearly not from Moscow, especially since the U.S. representatives have never hidden their sincere desire to help Chisinau solve the Transdnestrian problem, and the head of state is interested in promoting his 'big package' concept in the West and getting international support on the eve of the elections.

At the same time, it is quite difficult to guess what prompted Washington to take the Transdnestrian issue into manual control. Perhaps this is due to the desire of the United States not only to ensure strict control, but also to seize the initiative in the final political settlement. In this regard, in the near future we should expect additional intensification of the U.S. Embassy and American diplomacy in the negotiations between Chisinau and Tiraspol, even a specific Washington's plan for resolving the conflict.