

Moldovan Government Seeking Support in Moscow. Any 'Helping Hand'?

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As announced, the new Moldovan Prime Minister Ion Chicu made his first visit to Moscow. The debut visit is usually considered a political gesture that shows which foreign policy direction the government considers a priority. As you know, this is the first visit of the head of the Moldova's Cabinet of this kind in the past 7 years. All his predecessors tried first of all to visit Brussels, Washington and the nearest neighbors – Bucharest and Kyiv.

After the visit to Russia, the Moldovan public was shown the governmental program, and, most importantly, its foreign policy part. It boils down to the following: the new Cabinet plans to implement a balanced foreign policy and promote the status of permanent neutrality, based on international experience. In this regard, efforts will continue to withdraw foreign troops and ammunition, while the participation of the Moldovan military in international peacekeeping missions is not excluded.

Significant attention will be paid to the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU and the free trade area agreement with Europe. It is planned to restore pragmatic mutually beneficial relations with Russia, but also not to forget about the "strategic relationship" with the United States and Turkey. The government of Chicu intends to make particular efforts to engage in the CIS activities, as well as to use the status of an observer state in the Eurasian Economic Union to stimulate Moldovan exports to the EAEU market.

In the Transdniestrian direction, the Moldovan government, together with international partners in the 5+2 format, plans to begin "consensus-building" on the formula for the Left Bank reintegration, continue arranging joint control with Ukraine, as well as projects that contribute to confidence-building between the population of the two banks of the Dniester.

The Kremlin is probably still trying to recover from the unexpected loyal Moldovan government, which, judging by the visit, sees Moscow as the main financial and economic donor, especially after other Western capitals will try to distance themselves as much as possible from the 'socialist Cabinet' and even freeze macro-financial assistance. Meanwhile, judging by the statements of Russian officials and, above all, Dmitry Kozak, bursts of generosity are unlikely to be forthcoming.

It seems that Moscow clearly understands the true tasks of the current Cabinet, which, moreover, is influenced by the party of democrats, who will try to influence the overall agenda of the government. In this context, it will not be easy for Moldova to revive its strategic partnership with the Russian Federation.

The Kremlin behaves with exaggerated restraint in the Transdniestrian issue, hinting to Chisinau at clearly high expectations. Once again, Dmitry Kozak gently but persistently tries to refocus the attention of the Moldovan authorities to this problem, rightly believing that it requires a more stable political configuration in Moldova. Surely the 'rethinking of approaches' one way or another is happening in the team of Igor Dodon, who seriously changed the past self-confident rhetoric about the imminent political settlement.

The project of disposal of ammunition from Cobasna depots, which could retain some interest of Western partners in the government of Ion Chicu, also seems to be lost in the inability of Moldovan politicians to approach it. The Russian side continues to demonstrate benevolently openness and

readiness for such a project, which does not simplify the task for Moldovan politicians and personally Igor Dodon, who wants to remain handshakeable both in Moscow and in the West.

In the near future, the PSRM government will need a foothold in the international arena, but so far there is no clear support for the declared foreign policy ideas on either side.