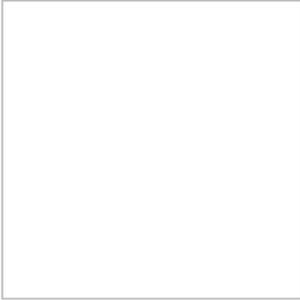


Can Memorandum with Eurasian Union diminish Moldova's European agenda? OP-ED

Op-Ed



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The Memorandum of cooperation, as the observer status in the Eurasian Union, which Russia is purportedly ready to offer to Moldova, can have serious medium- and long-term effects on the European integration processes in the country. Currently, these can serve more for media war and (geo)political propaganda purposes...



Shortly after his first 100 days in office, President Igor Dodon signed a Memorandum of cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union. Symbolically or not, but the executive office of President Dodon chose to sign the document in Chisinau, in the presence of the Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission Tigran Sargsyan ([Presedinte.md, April 2017](#)). The five-page Memorandum was published on the organization's official website on April 4 already, one day after its signing in Chisinau.

The content of the Memorandum hasn't been consulted with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, while Prime Minister Pavel Filip described it as "inopportune" and as a document that cannot bring "palpable economic and political advantages to the country". As the representative of the government coordinated by the Democratic Party and its leader Vladimir Plahotniuc, Premier Filip expressed criticism during his visit to Brussels, which was dedicated to the third EU-Moldova Association Council meeting ([Euroactiv, March 2017](#)). Besides the Memorandum of cooperation, the Moldovan Premier also condemned President Dodon's request to grant Moldova the observer status in the Eurasian Union. Contrary to the opinions shared by the government, President Dodon considers the Memorandum does not run counter to the Association Agreement with the EU. According to the President, the Memorandum is designed to diversify Moldova's exports and no way means entry into the Eurasian Union. This document, as other oscillations by the President towards Moscow, reveals the geopolitical discrepancies existing between the government and the presidential administration. Consequently, the bifurcation of the country's foreign policy ([IPN, March 2017](#)) is inevitable and President Dodon's unilateral actions, whose unconstitutionality becomes more uncertain, contributes to this.

Essence of Memorandum

When subjecting the text of the Memorandum to a simple analysis, we can deduce that its goal is symbolical rather than practical. This does not form part of the category of international treaties and thus does not impose rights or obligations regulated by international law ([Eurasian Union](#)). The document's symbolical-geopolitical character was confirmed by President Dodon, who noted that the Memorandum does not produce any legal effect.

In general, the Memorandum refers to the cooperation between Moldova, the Eurasian Union and its member states in a number of areas (customs cooperation, technical regulations, transport, energy, migration, public

procurement, etc.). The goal of the document is to increase the bilateral trade and investments and to eliminate barriers faced by these.

There will be set up a joint group that will meet at least once a year. In fact, this is to ensure interaction between the Eurasian Economic Commission and Moldova. The cooperation envisioned by the Memorandum will be ensured in the form of: exchange of information and experience; consultations in problematic areas: formulation of recommendations for eliminating barriers; bilateral meetings; organization of joint events (conferences, exhibitions, etc.); compilation of reports and other analytical products. Also, plans of action and cooperation programs that will mainly derive from the necessity of removing the commercial obstacles can be worked out based on the Memorandum.

Ultimately, the implementation of the Memorandum by one side or another can be stopped by the notification procedure. However, the stopping of the Memorandum's effect does not lead to the automatic annulment of all the actions initiated with its signing.

Useless and artificial Memorandum

No other significance than political and propagandistic can be attached to this Memorandum. The document does not impose legal obligations that would entail penalties for non-implementation. The attentive examination of the memorandum reveals the useless and, respectively, artificial and forced character of this document.

Firstly, the document does not have a practical significance as it covers areas (economy, transport, technical regulations etc.) where all the powers belong to the Government that now implements the reforms deriving from the Association Agreement with the EU.

The second aspect refers to Moldova's presence in the Commonwealth of Independent States, where cooperation relations were already established and where the latest trends within the Eurasian Economic Union are reflected, including at the level of technical regulations. Consequently, both the presidential administration and the Eurasian Commission initiated a Memorandum that in practical terms brings no value added.

The third aspect concerns the elimination of barriers, which is the key goal of the Memorandum, together with the diversification of exports. Until now Moldova hasn't faced commercial obstacles on the part of the Eurasian Union member states (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), except for Russia. With the development of the EU – Moldova relations, in 2013 Russia imposed a series of unilateral commercial restrictions on Moldova, many of which have been in force since 2017. Consequently, the Memorandum of cooperation with the Eurasian Union can no way replace the Moldovan-Russian bilateral dialogue on commercial subjects at the governmental level, which was instituted in November 2016.

Last but not least, the European integration is the national objective and this concentrates all the national efforts and resources on the rapprochement with the EU in all the public spheres of public policy. Consequently, the Memorandum distorts the public agenda because it envisions the working out of plans of action and programs by the Eurasian Commission and the presidential administration, for now, and these will be torn away from the Moldovan realities.

Is the Memorandum compatible with Moldova's European agenda?

The Memorandum with the Eurasian Union in the current political context does not pose a threat to the association agenda with the EU. However, the Memorandum, together with the eventual observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union, can significantly influence the public agenda and discourse before the 2018 parliamentary elections.

President Dodon's pro-Eurasian approaches are correlated with the population's expectations revealed by polls, which show that about 50% of the respondents support the Eurasian course. The party promoted by Igor Dodon – the Party of Socialists – became the main opposition party owing to its pro-Russian orientation, to which the pro-Eurasian rhetoric is added. Therefore, President Dodon and the Socialists will do nothing but intensely move towards the East so as to ensure a comfortable majority in the next legislative body.

From technical viewpoint, the Memorandum does not hamper the implementation of the European agenda, which strictly depends on the government's performance. As a symbolical connotation, the memorandum is not at all welcome as it transmits a chaotic message to the Moldovan public and to the European one, which financially contributes to improving the situation in the country.

Instead of conclusion...

Even if it is useless, the Memorandum of cooperation creates different permanent communication channels with the representatives of the Eurasian course. Thus, President Dodon can make the public opinion immune to the Eurasian integration idea. This also enables to increase the level of people's tolerance to the possible adjustments and limitations of the European agenda, which could end with the review or even abandonment of the Association Agreement, which is the most negative possible scenario.

The Socialists and President Dodon want to avoid at any cost an eventual Euromaidan in Chisinau, where the supporters of the European course would openly oppose the pro-Russian government's attempts to stop the European reform agenda.

The Memorandum of cooperation, as the observer status in the Eurasian Union, which Russia is purportedly ready to offer to Moldova, can have serious medium- and long-term effects on the European integration processes in the country. Currently, these can serve more for media war and (geo)political propaganda purposes.

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