

Chapter 8

Title **Grey is not a colour
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Why there is not going to be a Second Euromaidan
in Moldova, but potentially a Third Foreign Policy Coup
for Vladimir Putin

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Recently, especially when it comes to the news involving the EU and the Russian Federation, we observe a return of bipolarity. The Russian president is portrayed either as the last politician to be able to act in the interest of the people or the biggest danger to world peace. Vice versa, the US is blamed to be behind all major conflicts in recent history. Besides, the European Union is seen as unable to act; and if a decision is made, it is already too late because the situation has changed. The German Chancellor's attempt to prove readiness and willingness in the current refugee crisis creates realities that again split the population into two camps. The one who does see Germany responsible for acting, and the one that is concerned about the dangers arising from mass migration. But the main question here is not who is more dangerous – Vladimir Putin, Barack Obama, Jean-Claude Juncker or Angela Merkel – the real danger is experts taking one side and forcing their audience to do the same. Additionally, with all the major crises involving the European Union, respectively its member states, the Kremlin in Ukraine and Syria, as well as the challenges arising from the highly increased number of asylum seekers, smaller events such as the demonstrations in Chişinău tend to get almost no attention, although these also have relevance for the EU-Russia relations. With this article we want to illustrate this relevance, and also try to provide an overview with possible

scenarios and further sources to enable our readers to look at the broader picture of this impact on certain events in the shared neighbourhood.

15 years ago, the Serbian population demonstrated against dictator Milošević, which eventually led to his ousting and started a wave of democratization attempts in former socialist countries that soon would be called colour revolutions. Before those events happened, Mark Thompson described democratic revolutions as “spontaneous popular uprisings – peaceful, urban-based, and cross-class in composition – which topple unyielding dictators and begin a transition process which leads to the consolidation of democracy” (Thompson 2000). As it can be seen below, the use of nonviolent or civil resistance was a main characteristic of the colour revolutions. Demonstrations, strikes and interventions were the means to advocate democracy against governments seen as corrupt and/or authoritarian, creating a strong pressure for change. Creative, non-violent resistance, mostly implemented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and student activists – also across countries – included the adoption of a specific colour or flower as their symbol, hence coining the term colour revolutions. This has also already been used elsewhere, for instance in Portugal in 1974 or the Philippines

*Tents in front of
the Government
House in Chişinău*



*Source:
Iris Rehlau*

in 1986. Comparatively new was the export of knowledge from one country to another, the increased role of the media and, in the later cases, also the use of the internet/social media. In this context, several countries have experienced more or less successful transitions to democracy (and also a return to autocratic tendencies, amongst them Serbia). While there have been several studies (Thompson, 2004; Herd, 2005; Franklin, 2014) about the success and failure of those democratic revolutions identifying several determinants that led to transition (or not), two main factors could always be identified. If the security forces of the state (military, police, private) are not siding with the demonstrators or at least remain neutral, failure is almost always inevitable (Katz, 2004). A second characteristic was the united opposition, even if the smallest common denominator was getting rid of the old regime. Another pattern that could be observed related to this was a triggering event that led to mass mobilisation. In the cases mentioned before a "stolen election" brought people to the street. The opposition was able to rally various groups behind a candidate that had a real chance to win against the incumbent, who manipulated the results in order to secure his¹ power.

When we look at the Euromaidan 2014, we can already see a shift in the composition that does not fit the definition of democratic revolutions anymore and also has a different pattern. For one, Yanukovych undoubtedly reversed the democratisation of Ukraine, but he was democratically elected into office. However, more importantly, the protests were not non-violent and they did also not lead to a process of consolidation of democracy, but to a violent conflict in Eastern Ukraine and subsequently also to the annexation of Crimea. The triggering event was not a stolen election but the deci-

¹ In all cases for instance in Serbia 2000, Georgia 2003 and Ukraine 2004, the dictator/authoritarian leader was male and we therefore use only the masculine form.

sion of the president not to sign the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union.

The situation in Moldova again is different and therefore we will not see a second Euromaidan. However, we might see a third status quo ante, in which Moscow restores its influence on Chişinău respectively widening its direct involvement in the region. There is no stolen election and the question is also not whether Moldova is aiming for closer ties with Russia. Besides, both the Association Agreement and visa liberalisation with the EU have been agreed upon. The reason people are gathering – the triggering event – is the vanished 1 billion dollar. In April 2015, the central bank in Moldova discovered that three banks – Banca de Economii, Banca Socială and Unibank – granted loans that were not covered in the amount of 15% of the GDP (Deutsche Welle, 2015). The circumstances are still unclear, and therefore, distinction between the groups of protesters cannot be easily made. The crowd on the central square is diverse and there is no evident common goal as in Kiev – the signing of the AA – or in the colour revolutions – to do away with the ancien régime. The protesters in Chişinău could all agree upon getting rid of the oligarchs and the demand on the government to resign, but there is no common vision for the means how to achieve this.

Protests in the capital of Moldova are not the exception but nevertheless still something special. Therefore, the demonstrations with significant numbers that have been ongoing for days and weeks since 6 September 2015 are not to be neglected². As stated, this will not lead to a second Euromaidan and the tragic aftermath Ukraine had to experience, however, the protests in Chişinău could again lead to unforeseen outcomes. The European Union was caught relatively by surprise by the events that followed the East-

² The BBC reports tens of thousands making it the biggest protest ever in the former Soviet Republic (BBC News, 2015).

ern Partnership summit in Vilnius (and therefore also has to share some of the responsibility for them); it is likely that given the enormous challenges from the refugee numbers, the small country between Romania and Ukraine will not be in the centre of attention of Brussels. There are only a handful of journalistic and even fewer academic articles written on the protests. The observations we present are based on the personal experience of Iris Rehklaui, who has been in Chişinău from the beginning of October.

We emphasize two of the reflections from this participation in the demonstrations on 4 October 2015, four weeks after their start: the protest is dominantly grey. Not blue with pro-European protesters, not red with pro-Russian supporters, but grey with mainly grey-haired old people. Still, there has also been an attempt to create a relation to the

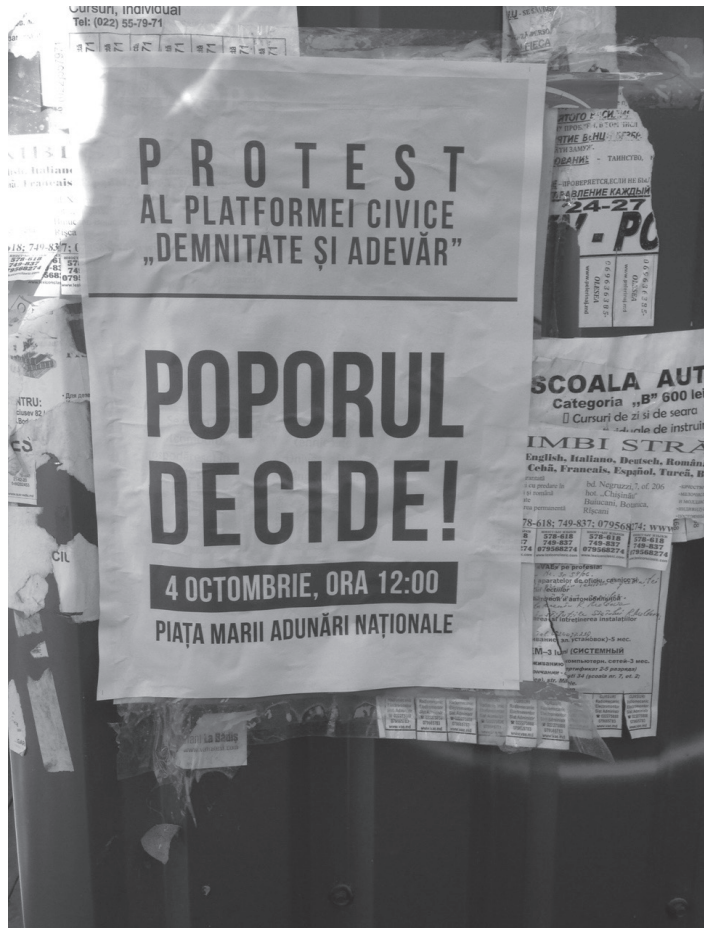
*Protester's
"most wanted"*



*Source:
Iris Rehklaui*

other colour revolutions – especially in the former CIS – by demonstrators distributing chrysanthemums to the police. Nevertheless, numbers of participants are declining, even though none of the demands have been met. The vanishing of the 1 billion dollar remains unresolved; and there is no sign of willingness of the government to step down. Apart from the question why it should do so, the answer to what would happen then is unclear, not only among the political parties. The special situation distinguishing the protests on the Piața

*Public call
for protest*



*Source:
Iris Rehklau*

Marii Adunări Naţionale in Chişinău from other (successful) democratic revolutions is that they are not primarily targeted at the government, but rather at the corrupt system. Former demonstrations, for instance in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine were aimed at the regime with ousting the dictator being the smallest common denominator of the opposition, which, after the goal achieved, fractured into their different interest groups. One of the uniting factors especially in Kiev was the pro-European intention of the protesters. In the case of Moldova, the governing coalition can already be considered to be oriented towards Brussels. The intentions of the protesters on the street are therefore split along political lines. Even though new elections will most likely benefit the pro-Russian parties being currently in opposition and they would also contribute to a prolonging of the uncertainty in the country, the pro-European mayor of Chişinău, Dorin Chirtoacă, won his election at the end of June 2015, long after the banking scandal was known to the public. During the municipal elections, entrepreneur Renato Usatîi has been elected as mayor in Bălţi replacing the former incumbent from the communist party. Usatîi is a member of the Patria party, which was suspended from the parliamentary elections in November 2014 due to receiving financing from Russia (Deutschlandfunk, 2014). But is this actually the goal of the protesters, to elect a new parliament and/or president? One can also ask the question why it actually took so long for the Moldovans to become outraged about the stolen billion and in conjunction with this: who is financing the protest?

There are pro-Russian protesters that are visibly younger than the other groups, especially in their "security" forces. They have placed themselves in front of the Parliament, an estimated 300 meters away from the rest of the demonstrations. The tents in their camp are bigger and better equipped than the ones of other groups also in terms of infrastructure such as toilets and Styrofoam boards for isolation, both

examples for equipment that is most likely not brought from the participants' households. During the protest there was also a food distribution to the Ușatî supporters from a field kitchen, making protesters not necessarily only join for the cause. This could be a sign that the equipment has rather been bought for the protest instead of brought by individuals, but of course there is no proof for this assumption. Although Ușatî did not publicly speak at the demonstrations, he was present with his bodyguards. There is also the Youth Party, which supports the unification with Romania and makes their demands by throwing darts on boards with faces of the oligarchs on them. And the group with the highest number of tents is located in front of the Government House. They have the biggest stage, the speeches are displayed on a screen and the participants are a conglomerate of various groups from different regions and political affiliations. The main protesters belong to the civil platform "dignity and truth" (Romanian: *Demnitate și Adevăr*) headed amongst others by the lawyer Andrei Năstase. There are a lot of rumours floating around and name-dropping among the population of Chișinău; for instance former Prime Minister Vlad Filat, oligarchs Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Shor or the Țopa brothers, who had to flee the country due to a sentence of ten years for fraud and live today in Frankfurt a.M., Germany. The absence of young people – and young in this case means under 40 – is the result of this situation. Nobody wants to stand on the street without the knowledge for whom and what. Another difference to Kiev is the lack of creativity in the way the protest is held. Apart from speeches every Sunday, starting on September 6th, with more than 40,000 people on the streets, nothing much is happening. Additionally, there is certainly also the experience from 2009 playing a role, when two young participants were killed. The demonstrations started after the elections mainly by young people accusing the communist party government of committing election

fraud in order to secure their power. After months of being unable to agree upon a new government, a pro-European coalition was formed (Slavkovic, 2009). Nevertheless, in the eyes of the protesters of five years ago, nothing changed at all in the country and their efforts have been in vain.

But not only the situation on the central square is different than in Kiev. We must not forget that 1,500 Russian soldiers are standing in Transnistria including also arsenal and equipment, so there is not even a need to send “green men” on holiday. Tiraspol, the capital, is less than a 1.5 hours’ drive

*Policemen with
chrysanthemums*



*Source:
Iris Rehlau*

from Chişinău. In the southern part of Moldova there is the autonomous region Gagauzia, which has already held a referendum to secede from Moldova in the case of a reunification with Romania. While this might seem unlikely, as mentioned previously, there are groups present at the demonstrations that advocate for it. Also in this case, a staged referendum would not even be necessary as in the case of Crimea. Furthermore, there are connections between Transnistria and Gagauzia. For example, Avdarma, 20 kilometres southeast from the Gagauzian capital Comrat, no longer looks like a typical Moldovan village. Now the inhabitants can visit a museum about their history, send their children to a well-equipped school, and later have the possibility to study in Tiraspol, get microfinancing to start businesses, and last but not least, are protected by a local security person. Avdarma-born Ignat Cazmalî, whose brother is a Transnistrian oligarch, made all this possible. Even if he has altruistic motives to renew his home village, and an official investment is potentially in danger of not reaching the intended aims due to the high level of corruption in the political system, this contributes to further destabilisation and social inequality. The village still has a mayor, but the city hall from where he governs was renovated by Cazmalî. Approximation between the two autonomous regions in Moldova is not only happening on the political level.

Moldova, the small country at the European border, is in a tension test. Belief in the political system has not been strong in recent years and is yet declining, making the state therefore a potentially easy “victim” for Russian expansion of its sphere of influence. On the positive side, while the EU is busy coping with the refugee crisis at its borders, the Kremlin is getting involved in Syria and might have its resources bound. Nevertheless, Vladimir Putin has proven that he is capable to exercise politics as if Machiavelli had written “The Prince” for him and not for Lorenzo II de’ Medici. Due

to the situation described in Transnistria and Gagauzia, even with Russian troops now being engaged in Syria, the Russian president will have little to no effort to create realities in Moldova and force the West to accept the new status quo – maybe even for the third time after the annexation of Crimea and the support of the Assad regime in Syria in around two years. The fact is, Putin is ready to move fast. Like almost no other politician in the world, he has the ability to make decisions based on opportunity – and the power to implement them. His ambition and possibility to create a new status quo can currently not be matched by any other global actor. Not the US with Obama having the Congress against him, and also not the EU that remains a divided and slow foreign policy actor. The annexation of Crimea and the set-up of a military base in Latakia, Syria, did not and will not face consequences. A potential destabilization of the Baltic states and speculations about attempts to challenge the NATO's commitment to Article 5 (Tilghman and Pawlyk, 2015) – the attack on one member country is seen as an attack on all NATO countries and consequently would lead to a mutual counterattack – as the next move in Putin's foreign policy completely disregards the following: The Russian military is already present in Moldova with 1,500 troops in Transnistria, 500 of them being peacekeepers. Although the break-away region is landlocked between Moldova and Ukraine, the Tiraspol airport might be ready to operate military cargo (Kucera 2015). Although Moldova prevents troop movements through its territory, Russian soldiers could easily fly into the country via Chişinău unofficially. The airport is expanding and some parts are currently under construction; the owner is the Russian private company Avia Invest.

More for more is a useful approach in the European Neighbourhood Policy, but Brussels needs to keep their part as well. What more has the EU to offer to bring about reform in Moldova? The judicial system is one of the most corrupt

in the world, and corruption generally remains the main obstacle for development in Moldova – to a similar extent as in Ukraine. But apart from offering a membership perspective – something that currently nobody in the EU would support openly – there is no “more” to offer from Brussels. The visa regime has been abolished but the benefits arising from it have been marginal, since Moldovans, who wanted to travel to the EU and, more importantly, work there, could already bypass this by getting a Romanian passport. The benefits from the AA will help the country’s economic development, but this will not have an immediate effect visible to the population, especially due to the export ban for several agricultural products imposed by Moscow as a direct consequence to the closer ties between Chişinău and Brussels.

*Renato Usatii
and Igor Dodon
on a “dart board”*



*Source:
Iris Rehlau*

So on paper we have a situation that is fundamentally different from that of Kiev. The opposition is fragmented; Russian troops are already in the country; what is more, reinforcements could be transferred through Tiraspol (cargo) and Chişinău (soldiers). Gagauzia has already held a referendum clearly voting in favour of joining the Eurasian Economic Union. Transnistria is a de facto independent state since 1992, although not even the Russian Federation has recognized it. Ties between Tiraspol and Comrat are not only politically, but also socially and economically evolving, but the demonstrators do not have a clear vision for what is going to happen next. None of the different groups are emerging as an alternative and this could be the exact reason why Putin is not going to be able to make a move. Without a triggering event, there is no possibility to justify an "invasion" of Moldova or stage a reunification with Russia under the pretence of protecting Russian passport holders. A crucial event will be the upcoming presidential election in March. After struggling to elect a new prime minister, Pavel Filip was appointed on 20 January 2016, bringing a new impetus to the demonstrations due to his alleged close ties to oligarch Plahotniuc. Rumours about Plahotniuc running for president are already going around and his election could be the final spark needed to bring even more people to the street creating a potential window of opportunity for Putin.

In conclusion, what is going to happen? We honestly do not know. And we also do not want to engage in speculations or historic comparisons. The reason is not that we do not want to make assumptions that later are disproved by history – and we do believe that gambling of making bold assumptions to become famous is something to be criticized. We, of course, would not want to publish statements that are later proven wrong. Nobody does. But the main reason for not making any predictions is that we want our readers – as indicated in the introduction – to draw conclusions for

themselves by reading different opinions and then formulate their own.

In this sense, we are convinced that the DRC Summer School offers an ideal surrounding. Experts, academics and practitioners with different backgrounds provide insight into various topics, and students coming from various disciplines and countries of the Danube River Basin enrich these insights. Especially this year's edition had participants from countries ranging from the source in Baden-Württemberg to the delta in Ukraine. The publication represents written proof of the diversity and contributes to the debate we described. Formats like the DRC Summer School are more necessary than ever and we are very glad that the next edition has moved already from the planning stage into development.

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