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The European “grey zone”

On October 6th, the Prime Minister of Moldova and the Prime Minister of Ukraine, respectively Pavel Filip and Volodimir Groisman, stated that “Moldova and Ukraine have excellent relations. In fact, these relations are natural for two neighbouring countries, for two states that respect each other and face a range of similar problems”. The Prime Minister of Moldova highlighted the importance of bilateral economic relations, including relaunching the Moldovan-Ukrainian intergovernmental commission on commercial-economic cooperation. Another main topic of discussion has been the joint control at state borders. In this regard, they said that new common crossing points would be opened for the benefit of citizens and the business environment.

“We give a very clear signal that while some countries are building borders and barriers, Moldova and Ukraine are building bridges and trying to communicate even better”, said Pavel Filip. These signals could represent a significant example for a group of states sharing uncertainty for their role in the International scenario. “We pay special attention to the development of our bilateral relations, to solve a number of problems that approach our countries and to remove the existing barriers. Thanks to our efforts, the volume of bilateral trade has increased by over 30 percent”, said Mr Groisman [Prime ministers of Moldova and Ukraine consider bilateral relations excellent, Government of Republic of Moldova, 6 October 2017].

In their path towards the European institutions, Moldova and Ukraine have participated with the EU Member States, to the Commission Initiative on Central and South-Eastern European Energy Connectivity (CESEC), on the 28th September, to reinforce regional cooperation in addressing energy challenges, as part of a special meeting in Bucharest. The meeting brought together nine EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia) and eight Energy Community Contracting Parties (FYROM, Serbia, Ukraine, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Moldova). The participants agreed on a joint approach to electricity markets, energy efficiency and renewable development. They also established a list of priority projects to build an interconnected regional electricity market, as well as actions to boost renewables and investment in energy efficiency [European Commission Press release, Energy: Strengthening solidarity between Central and South-Eastern European Countries, European Commission, 28 September 2017].

These are positive signals to contrast Putin's hegemonic will on Eastern Europe and South Caucasus. The improvement of relations between the countries belonging to the geopolitical “grey zone” of Eastern Europe, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and (to some extent) Azerbaijan, is a good wish not only for themselves but also for containing regional tensions and providing support against Russian interference.

Indeed, the collapse of the “grey zone” countries could have far-reaching implications and repercussions for the eastern member states of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance [Andreas Umland, Eastern and Central Europe’s Strategic Provincialism, Carnegie Europe, 12 October 2017].

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