

Interview with Natalia Gherman, candidate for UN Secretary General: “Human rights transcend security, development, and humanitarian responses”

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*The United Nations will select a new Secretary General this year to take over from Ban Ki-moon, whose term ends on 31 December. In the leadup to the appointment, we will be featuring interviews with some of the candidates for the role. In the [second of these discussions](#), EUROPP editors Tena Prelec and Stuart Brown speak to **Natalia Gherman**, the candidate from Moldova, on her plans for the UN and what her experience in domestic politics would allow her to bring to the position.*



What motivated you to put your name forward as a candidate for Secretary General?

I decided to become a candidate for UN Security General because I continue to believe that the United Nations is the best way of facilitating collective action among countries around the world. I think we need the United Nations today more than ever before. And I'm sure that the values which were enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations remain just as valid today as they ever have been.

The new process that we now have for selecting the next Secretary General, which was encouraged by the member states, offers all of us as candidates the opportunity to engage with citizens, civil society, journalists, academia, research institutions and national governments in order to present our vision and priorities. This will also allow the citizens of the world to get an understanding of what kind of people we are on a personal level. And I think it is a privilege to be part of this process.

What is your background in politics and what you say is your key achievement?

Early on I decided to become a diplomat. I started my career in the Moldovan diplomatic service 25 years ago and I'm still involved in this area. But that also coincided with one of the most important periods in Moldova's history as we transitioned from a centrally planned economy to a market driven one. We also had to deliver on security as our region still presents a number of challenges in this respect, while also attempting to eradicate extreme poverty in Moldova and providing education and health.

I was the chief negotiator for more than three years when we negotiated our Association Agreement with the European Union and established the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between Moldova and the EU. And I also successfully led the visa liberalisation dialogue that eliminated the necessity for Moldovan citizens to have a visa for travelling to the Schengen Area. That was a very challenging task, particularly as we had to make sure our country was prepared for the new ways of doing things that come with our agreements.



Natalia Gherman in London. Credits: Aleksandra Stankova / LSE

What qualities do you think you could bring to the role of Secretary General?

I think the next Secretary General has to be a good communicator, with the ability to reach out to each and every citizen across the world and explain the current agenda. They will need to be able to mobilise all of the resources and commitments necessary to deliver on shared goals. This communication and level of engagement in realising shared goals is more relevant to the United Nations today than it has ever been.

You have said that civil society should be at the centre of any dialogue, as otherwise there cannot be a true transformation. We are currently seeing a duality between stability and democracy, something that the European Union is struggling with as well. In cases in which there are clear authoritarian tendencies on display, would you privilege working with the elected leaders, or with civil society?

We can do much better by taking on board the input of civil society into the activity of all our elected governments and into the activity of the UN. I plan to institute an office that will act as a liaison between the different civil society organisations around the world and report to the Secretary General directly.

The issue of engaging and working with the democratically and openly elected leaders and governments in each country is of course for our member states to engage. The Secretary General, elected by the broad membership of the UN, will do very well if they engage in an open and frank dialogue with all parties concerned within a country, or between two countries, in order to understand the issues raised by all actors. In so doing, the Secretary General should be able to prepare well-informed decisions by the member states in any particular situation.

Isolating and turning our back on anyone in such circumstances is not the best option. We have to embrace absolutely all mechanisms at our disposal to come to a consensus-based solution.

Human rights and security are two of the biggest issues facing the world: if you had to prioritise one of these, which would you choose?

I would answer this question with an axiom: 'There is no security without development, there is no development without security, and there is nothing without human rights.'

Human rights transcend security, development, and humanitarian responses. Our actions in everything have to be

people-centred. Human dignity stands at the centre of absolutely everything the United Nations is doing.

As you know, several candidates have put their names forward for Secretary General and you have mentioned that the new process is more transparent and inclusive. Do you think it would be a failure if someone who is not from this original pool of names eventually becomes Secretary General? Given the history of previous appointments this would appear quite possible.

I am sure that there will be more candidates nominated by their respective governments in the coming months, but as I have said, the more the better, because this makes the competition more interesting and an eventual victory more deserved.

But I think that without an official nomination and without passing through all the transparent stages through which we – the original candidates – had to pass, it would be much more difficult for anybody to be elected and accepted by the broader membership. The Security Council votes on the candidate, but this appointee still needs to be presented to the General Assembly for endorsement. Now that the General Assembly is engaged so actively and transparently in the process, they feel a sense of ownership over it and believe they have a big role to play. I feel very positively about the way the process has been carried out so far.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics. Natalia Gherman gave a talk at the LSE in April 2016, organised by the LSE's International Relations department. You can listen to the podcast of her talk [here](#).

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About the interviewee

Natalia Gherman

Natalia Gherman is a former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova. She is a career diplomat holding the diplomatic rank of Ambassador. In June-July 2015 she was acting Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova. In February 2016, the Moldovan government formally nominated Ms Gherman as a candidate for the position of UN Secretary-General.

