

SUNC World View
Connecting Conversations: A World View Podcast

Episode 3 – Secretary of State Elaine Marshall– The North Carolina-Moldova Partnership

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Interview by Charlé LaMonica, Director of UNC World View

Charlé LaMonica: Welcome to UNC World View's *Connecting Conversations*. My name is Charlé LaMonica and we're really glad you're joining us. I would love to give a little bit of a flashback before we begin our interviews. For nearly 10 days in June of 2019 a delegation of 11 K-12 teachers and administrators from across North Carolina boarded a plane to the Republic of Moldova on a UNC World View Global Study Visit. The Study Visit goals included increasing educators' knowledge and understanding about Moldova's history and culture, developing their global competencies as they investigated global issues, recognizing different perspectives and learning how to communicate across cultures. And also, very importantly, increasing their knowledge and understanding of this very unique relationship between North Carolina and Moldova. The delegation that went on this World View Study Visit including educators representing Bertie County Schools, Duplin County Schools, Greene County Schools, Hertford, Hope County Schools, Lee County Schools, Perquimans Schools and Onslow County Schools. When everyone came home, they really felt as though it was transformative. The UNC World View Study Visit to Moldova was also supported by the North Carolina Moldova bilateral partnership and hosted by the Academy for Innovation and Change Through Education in Moldova.

North Carolina educators returned home really inspired by the Moldovan people that they met there. So, as part of the Study Visit, North Carolina educators participated in professional development trainings and they led presentations. They visited schools and engaging discussions and exchanges a best practice with educators. They also met with the ambassador to Moldova, Derek Hogan, toured the parliament, visited with Moldova Secretary of Education and other local government and educational officials. Once home the educators then transferred their experience back to North Carolina classrooms and schools.

Well, that was almost a year ago, the world has changed. Fast forward to June 2020 the world definitely has changed, but the relationship between North Carolina and Moldova has not.

So today, this podcast, *Connecting Conversations*, will focus on the rich partnership between North Carolina and Moldova: a chance to learn about how it came to be with a conversation with North Carolina Secretary of State, Elaine Marshall and a check-in with a sixth grade teacher in Moldova, Victoria Isac, to learn how her teaching practice has evolved during these most challenging times of COVID-19.

Joining us today is North Carolina Secretary of State, Elaine Marshall, who will share with us the many reasons why North Carolina has such a rich relationship with the country of Moldova.

In 1996 Secretary of State Elaine Marshall became the first woman ever elected to a statewide executive branch office in North Carolina. She was a member of the North Carolina State Senate before rising to statewide office. She holds a B.S. in home economics from the University of Maryland and a law degree from Campbell University, as well as many honorary degrees, including one from the Republic of Moldova Testemitanu State University of Medicine. Which I find really fascinating and I want to welcome Secretary Marshall to this podcast. We value so much the friendship with Secretary Marshall and appreciate all that she does for the people of North Carolina. So thank you, Secretary Marshall for spending time with us to learn firsthand about this unique relationship.

Secretary Marshall: Thank you. And thank you for that nice introduction. I think maybe we need to add a half a footnote to that. I have been a public school teacher in Lenoir County and also taught in the community colleges, several of them around the state. So I have the perspective of a teacher in my background. I started out to be a 4-H educator, which is an adult educator and youth educator and I did some time in the classroom. So I certainly understand the feelings and emotions that teachers have relative to their students and their great profession. I'm delighted to be here with you all. So thank you.

This partnership started a long time before I got involved in it. After the Soviet Union broke up, the NATO and Western forces realized that a lot of small countries were going to be created, a lot of them were going to be inadequate in their economy, and also they hadn't been self-determining in their government for a long period of time. Moldova, in particular, having been taken over against their will during the World Wars. And so it was difficult for them to get a footing. They're identified as the poorest country in Eastern Europe, I would say that's in money terms that is not in terms of the heart of the people and the desire of the people at all. They are rich in those. So the Western forces decided they were going to need help from somewhere.

And it was not appropriate for military assistance directly to be given to these countries, so something called the Partnership for Peace was developed, and it was between National Guards of states and various countries. North Carolina and Moldova were paired up. After our guard personnel were there for lots of years doing missions and things and assisting and digging deep wells and helping orphanages and lot of different things, they thought "we need to do more civilian things." So an outreach was made between the President of Moldova and Governor Hunt at the time to do a civilian partnership.

Governor Hunt asked me to chair that partnership on the North Carolina side and I have been delighted to do that now 21 years. We celebrated our 20th anniversary

last year, the partnership agreement is five years in duration, but it has been renewed under Democrat and Republican governors. Last time was just last year in 2019. Governor Cooper signed the agreement, I carried it over to Moldova where the Prime Minister signed it. So both parties signed it and we had in essence two 20-year celebrations: one here in North Carolina and then several weeks later in Moldova.

It was my 10th or 11th visit there, and I have to count that up exactly how many times it's been, but I've been multiple times and the reception for anybody from North Carolina is warm and welcoming. You will probably find more North Carolina flags in Moldova than any other place in Europe, I would I would bet the mortgage money on that. They are so in tune to people from North Carolina and the doors are open. The bonds of trust that were the aim of the Partnership for Peace have really been solid with Moldova and indeed their country has had various changes in government and the partnership has endured those also.

So we have facilitated medical, academic, business and cultural exchanges between North Carolina over the course of the partnership. The Moldova teacher partnership got going. That's been one of the most delightful parts of the partnership. Because we've got enthusiastic teachers here in North Carolina, and we've got enthusiastic teachers in Moldova and nothing is going to stop a bunch of enthusiastic teachers from getting something done when they set their mind to it.

This started with the request of the embassy there that identified what they thought was a promising school to begin this partnership with as all of us know school leadership is very important in order for projects to be successful. So this partnership not only enhances English language instruction for Moldovan children, and in the international realm, being able to speak English is a tremendous economic enhancement for someone's long term lifetime earnings, but it also provides cultural exchange opportunities. Here we are now, fast-forwarding, we have over 50 classrooms here in North Carolina and in Moldova getting to know each other. They learn about each other's countries and culture and language. Details on the school partnership are this: it was initiated in 2016 and has had activity every year since then. It's grades 4 through 12. I said we've got 50 of them. We have seven to nine months of joint training and exchanges in any given year, and the partner schools pick projects and they work together on them.

Whether it's environmental or community development, the children, talk about it. I've listened to some exchanges. I've listened to exchange is talking about holidays that are different. How are celebrated their how they're celebrating here. Moldova has a unique beginning of spring called Martisor, and our children have never heard that. And all of a sudden our children here are making the little lapel pins that go with Martisor, the red and white colors. And so, we started some school partnership things way back when, in the early 2000s and that unfortunately was not successful. It was not successful, due to the lack of computers and reliable electricity and all of those things for students to communicate with each other.

But here we are, we are in the world of Skype and now those of us in the Corona quarantine situation. We have learned what Zoom and WebEx and GoToMeeting and all those kinds of things can be so all of those have enhanced, as well as a blog, the communications back and forth.

At the end of the school year the schools create video reports. I've seen books that have been prepared, it just such excitement and motivation by the students. This program is supported by the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Embassy, great cooperation from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the Moldova Ministry of Education. We've been able to provide them with classroom charts, much like you'd see in any classroom here, bright and colorful. My chief deputy, who is a geologist, was horrified on his first visit into a Moldovan school when he was into a science class and the periodic chart—this would have been in, let's say, 1991-92—the periodic chart only had about 80 elements on it. So far behind in current information. So he made it his personal commitment to get quality education materials into the schools.

CL: And also there's been many book drives, have there not?

SM: Exactly. The second part of that. As we as a state are moving to more digital and other types of classroom materials, a lot of good quality, gently used textbooks are being returned to the school textbook warehouse for destruction. Fortunately, the Department of Public Instruction has decided that that cost can be saved and books are called out so that those that are not going to have as much life expectancy to them are called out and the gently used ones are gathered and periodically, we send over containers containing medical supplies and books. And as you know, books are very, very heavy. But we are able to raise the funds and do the container work and we are incredibly grateful to Mr. Fairchild, who runs the book warehouse, and his staff. They are masters at putting together a container. It's kind of like a Rubik's Cube puzzle to not waste a single inch in a 40 foot container because when they show up at the warehouse to be loaded. We have two hours to load them. So when the forklift starts rolling, you better step back. We've taken the ambassador to the warehouse, who has been impressed—our U.S. Ambassador—has been impressed with the quality of the books and it's every age, every topic. We try to make sure they get lots of books on English and sentence composition and those kinds of things, history, science—very much in short supply over there. So it is like Christmas all over again when those books arrive and they're starting to be distributed to the schools.

When I was there last year, the children came up and thanked me and gave me little tiny gifts from their schools that they had made, mostly, and a couple of them said, “Oh, thank you for the books. These are the only English books we have.” A couple of them said, “We take very good care of them.” And I know that is so. The people of Moldova have a culture of making things last. They hold on to whatever they have that adds value and they don't have a trash recycling problem like we do, at all.

Because of their long history of being impoverished things are very, very, very well used, and I will tell anybody who's never been there and thinking about going the streets of the city are incredibly clean the folks have a lot of pride in their living places. When leaves fall off the tree and the autumn time they're out there, sweeping them up every day. It is a very interesting place to visit. And you can see how people can be resourceful, even though they have next to nothing in their life. They somewhat don't understand charity because they've never had excesses to give to somebody else. Now, they will help a person. There's no doubt about it. If it can be time, but they don't have money to contribute to any projects.

A lot of the things that are done in Moldova are also done with other financial resources that come from, say, rotary clubs around the world. Our rotary clubs here in North Carolina have been very, very generous that have developed an interest in Moldova. Other world organizations, the Embassy Wives in particular, that end up being assigned to Moldova from France and Italy and things like that have resources that they can use within the country. And we collaborate over spending and doing building projects and sanitation projects in schools. I've been to schools that house about 800 students that did not have any indoor bathrooms until we put them in there. Our National Guard folks actually did the construction. The embassies picked out the places where this was to take place because they knew that community was receptive to this. They knew that the leadership of the school would make sure that things were well cared for. There are a lot of beautiful things coming together. We just can't understate how this partnership as a whole has meant to the citizens there, and particularly to the students there. It's important to me as a person who does have a worldview and important to me as a former teacher and important to me as a leader in North Carolina to know that our work is very well received and very well appreciated and very well used. Now, we have a National Guard person there all the time attached to the embassy and I've been in this position now for 20 years and so continuity and having eyes on the ground is something that makes the partnership very, very workable. We only deal with individuals there and the embassy and our North Carolina guard people there know who the reliable mayors are, they know who the more progressive of the schools and they know the communities that are more open to receiving assistance. There are some ethnic divides in the country and so the assistance of either nonprofits there or the embassy or National Guard people is very helpful so that our efforts are not squandered, they're not wasted there and that's important.

CL: When you mention the word "collaboration," I can't think of a more collaborative group. When I attended the Moldovan-North Carolina committee meeting that you had last year before you left to re-sign the agreement, I was amazed at the variety of people throughout the state that were involved. They were so excited about North Carolina teachers going. And of course, when our teachers came back to North Carolina, they couldn't wait to share out in their classrooms and create really interesting teaching techniques and share best practices that they learned, but mostly the relationships as you underscore. It's in a strategic place in the world as well, as a small country. I was wondering if you could in closing speak

about the partnership. What do you think in terms of the teachers in partnership and the variety of ways North Carolina's connected, what do you think is the most value-added to having the partnership of Moldova and North Carolina.

SM: Well, the professional development opportunities for folks, both here and there is very, very important and we all want our students to become the next generation of globally-educated leaders. So as we've had these various steps along the way—visits from teachers there, our visit last year there—it is better opportunities for global connections, because these young people are going to be the ones making the decisions of the world.

We're now a global pandemic. If there's ever an example of why global cooperation and global understanding is important, it is right now. Things do transcend national borders. We've shared some of our North American values with them things on quality education, clean water, cleaning and protecting the environment, community development. This partnership has given birth to all types of things we haven't even talked about medical—and I can do lots of medical stuff, but I know we're talking about education today. We've facilitated a lot of visits here and there and we're always looking forward to improving the exchange. I truly believe that person to person, citizens to citizen diplomacy is the key aspect to peace key aspect to everybody's enhanced future, everybody's well being, achieving everybody's personal family goals have a healthy family, safe home, adequate food, reasonably adequate medical care, those kinds of things—that's universal and we can share with each other. Diplomacy at the top levels of government, you know, that's kind of like an elevator. It goes up and down, up and down, up and down, but the strength of personal relationships, the strength of people to people relationships will endure forever.

CL: Secretary Marshall, I can't thank you enough for joining us today and helping us really frame out what this relationship between North Carolina and Moldova is to our state and to our teachers and students.

SM: Let me tell you that anyone that's interested can go to sosnc.gov and click on “topics” and you can go to “international” and you can see a lot of stuff about Moldova, including a four part series that involves a lot of education projects in there. One part of it is dedicated solely to education. It's called “People to People.” Please go to sosnc.gov or look at your resource digest for this particular podcast. And please, please enjoy what we've got up there.

CL: Thank you again, we'll be sure to have that on our website as well. And I want to thank you for what you've done personally and professionally for the teachers of North Carolina. I guess once a teacher, always a teacher.

SM: Correct. Once a teacher, always a teacher.

CL: Thank you very much, Secretary Marshall.