

# Policy brief about the foreign policy evolution of the Republic of Moldova during the period of 2009-2019

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
ACUM	Electoral bloc consisted of Action and Solidarity Party and the Dignity and Truth Platform Party
AIE	Alliance for European Integration
BI	Building Integrity
BPO	Barometer of Public Opinion
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CPDD	UN Partnership Framework - Republic of Moldova for Sustainable Development
CSF	Civil Society Forum
DCBI	Defense Capacity Building Initiative
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DPM	The Democratic Party of Moldova
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
ENPI	European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument
EP	Eastern Partnership
EU	European Union
EVI	European Neighborhood Instrument
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GUAM	Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova)
HMMWV	High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle
ILO	International Labor Organization
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan negotiated
IPP	Individual Partnership Program
IVF	International Visegrad Fund
KFOR	UN / NATO peacekeeping mission in Kosovo
MFAEI	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration
MNBG-W	Multinational Battle Group-West
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NAFS	National Agency for Food Safety
NAMSO	NATO Organization for Maintenance and Supply
NAPIAA	National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Association Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

ODA	Official Development Aid
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PARP	Planning and Review Process
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PCM	Partnership Cooperation Menu
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PGG	The Partnership for Good Governance
PiS	The Law and Justice Party
RF	Russian Federation
RM	The Republic of Moldova
RoAid	Romania's International Development Cooperation Agency
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPRM	Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova
SPS	Science for Peace and Security Program
TVR	Romanian Public Television
UN	United Nations Organization
UN Women	The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	The United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	The United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	The United Nations Industrial Development Organization
USA	The United States of America
V4	Visegrad Four
V4 Plus	Visegrad Four Plus
V4EaP	Visegrad Four Eastern Partnership Program
WHO	World Health Organization

## About the experts



**Ion Tăbârță** holds a Bachelor degree in history (the Moldova State University) and political science (the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest), as well as master degree in international relations (University of Bucharest). He is working as an expert at the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) “Viitorul”. Between 2003-2019 he worked as a university lecturer, teaching the following courses: Foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova, Political history of the Republic of Moldova, Democratic transition and Conflictology. Ion is the author of several scientific materials and analytical notes on the foreign and domestic policy of the Republic of Moldova. In the public space Ion Tăbârță is known as a political analyst.



**Natalia Stercul** is a political scientist, PhD, expert and Program Director, Eastern Studies Department: Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova. As an expert on Eastern studies, Natalia actively collaborates with civil society organizations from Moldova and abroad. As well, she contributes through didactic activities to the development of the young generation of leaders due to their involvement in community projects and participation in social-political processes. She has higher education in the field of International Relations at the Moldova State University and the Academy of Sciences of Moldova. Natalia Stercul is the author of over 60 scientific papers.



**Oktawian Milewski**, native from Moldova, is an expert in Central and East Europe area studies. Since 2015 he is affiliated to the Graduate School of Social Research, the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy, where he specializes in the political sociology of the spaces on the EU's Eastern border. Oktawian is also the RFI Romania's correspondent in Poland. He graduated the College of Europe (2015), the University of Bucharest (2005), the National School of Political and Administrative Studies (2003) and the State University of Balti (2001).



**Mihai Popșoi** is the deputy-president of the Action and Solidarity Party and Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. He is a candidate for PhD degree in political studies at the University of Milan. He is a member of the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova, where he previously worked as an associate expert. He worked as a political analyst in the political-economic section within the United States Em-

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**Victoria Roșă** – is a foreign policy and security expert. Mrs. Roșă served as Senior Security and Defence / EU affairs Adviser of the Moldovan Prime-minister Maia Sandu. Prior to that she held for more than 2 years the position of Executive Director of the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova. She holds a BA and MA degree in international relations, political and administrative sciences from the Moldova State University. Between 2005-2010, Victoria worked as a lecturer at the International Relations Department, Moldova State University as well as joined the activity of various nongovernmental organisations. From April 2018 till July 2019, Victoria moderated the daily evening political talk-show “Punctul pe azi” on the National Romanian Television TVR, Moldovan branch. She is the author of several publications on foreign and security policies, and Moldova’s relation with the European Union. Mrs. Roșă has provided expertise to national and international organisations in the framework of various thematic programs (Freedom House, Austrian Ministry of Defense, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Leipzig University, TAMPERE Peace Research Institute, etc.). Victoria Roșă is a 2017 Alumni of the Marshall Memorial Fellowship of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

## The Western development vector of the Republic of Moldova (between 2009 - 2019). The relationship with the European Union and Romania

**Ion Tăbârță**

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Starting with 2009, the European development vector with the declared purpose of European Union (EU) integration is the main priority of Republic of Moldova's (RM) domestic and foreign policy. The chronological evolution of the relations between Republic of Moldova and EU during 2009-2019 can be divided into two basic stages: 1) 2009-2014 - preparation and signing of the Association Agreement (AA); 2) 2014-2019 - the implementation by the Republic of Moldova of the AA. In these years, the nature of the Moldovan - Community relations went through powerful metamorphoses - from «success story», in 2010-2012, to a problematic state, in 2015-2019.

After 10 years of priority relations with the EU and 5 years after the entry into force of the AA, with all the difficulties of implementation, Moldova has gone through a series of important developments and transformations for the Moldovan society. The AA has generated some processes that already have an impact for the Republic of Moldova. The EU has become the main trading partner of the Republic of Moldova, about 70% of Moldovan exports go to the Community market, the amount reaching up to almost 2 billion USD. Since April 2014,

Moldovan citizens can travel freely in the EU using biometric passports. During the last 5 years over 2 million Moldovans enjoyed the opportunity to travel without restrictions in the Community area. In Moldova an extensive process of social and institutional modernization has begun, so far steadily. The delays that our state has in implementing AA do not yet make visible its positive effects on the Moldovan citizens' welfare. The main impediment to the rapid progress of the AA implementation is the insufficient political will of the Chisinau governments.

Romania is the natural ally of Moldova in achieving the European path. After 2009, a series of issues that caused tensions in the relationship between the two states until then, in terms of identity, language and history, ceased to be a priority on the bilateral agenda, as Moldova radically changed its attitude towards Romania. The two countries have worked wonderfully in several areas. The blue prints of the Moldovan - Romanian bilateral relations were established through a strategic partnership between the two states for the European integration of Moldova signed in 2010. The new dynamic of the Moldovan - Romanian relations focused on the political, economic and cultural dimension has been reflected through a series of high-level reciprocal visits, the signing of several bilateral agreements and the permanent support granted by Romania to Moldova.



The upward dynamics of Moldovan - Romanian relations is eloquently manifested through the trade exchanges between the two states, Romania becoming, since 2014, the first trading partner of the Republic of Moldova. An important aspect of the Moldovan - Romanian relationship is the cooperation in the energy field, emphasizing the interconnection of the natural gas and electricity systems of the two countries. Moldova is the main beneficiary of Romanian development assistance, most of the financial assistance being provided in the field of education. Traditionally, the Moldovan - Romanian relationship in the cultural field is a close one. However, the potential of Moldovan - Romanian cooperation has not been yet fully exploited. Apart from the project of energy connection of the Republic of

Moldova, other large Romanian programs and investment projects in the Republic of Moldova are missing. Another important aspect of the Moldovan - Romanian relationship is the insufficient presence of Romania in the Republic of Moldova's media and information space, which gives it linguistic, historical and cultural affinity.

In this paragraph of the study, the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU and the bilateral Moldovan - Romanian cooperation between 2009-2019 are related. The two strategic relations of the Republic of Moldova have been presented from the perspective of the chronological evolution and the analysis of the existing problems, both in the relations with the EU and with Romania.

## The relationship between Republic of Moldova with the EU

### The political dialogue

*Negotiation of the Association Agreement.* In May 2009, the European Union included the Republic of Moldova, along with 5 other post-Soviet states (Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), in the European Neighborhood Policy Eastern Partnership (EaP). The purpose of the EaP institutional project is to strengthen the political association and economic integration with the EU of the six post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus.

The declared pro-European government in Chisinau - Alliance for European In-

tegration (AEI), established on September 25, 2009, decided on November 13, 2009 to start negotiations of the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU. The dialogue between Moldova and the EU included three levels of negotiation: the AA framework document, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and the visa liberalized regime. Due to the commitment shown by both parties, the technical negotiations on the AA between the Republic of Moldova and the EU have been dynamic, being completed on all three levels in 2013. An important aspect of the negotiations was the insistence of the Republic of Moldova to obtain from the EU a clear European per-

spective by mentioning in the agreement the possibility of obtaining the candidate state status. Despite all the efforts made by the Moldovan diplomacy, Chisinau failed to obtain from Brussels the guarantee of the subsequent political integration of the Republic of Moldova into the EU by stipulating in the text of the AA a potential candidate-state status in the future. On November 28-29, 2013, at the EaP summit in Vilnius Moldova initialed the AA text with the EU.

### *Signing of the Association Agreement.*

On April 28, 2014, the Council of the European Union amended the EU Regulation on the abolition of the visa requirement for short-term travel in the Schengen area for Moldovan citizens holding the biometric passport.<sup>1</sup> After fulfilling a number of conditions required by the EU, such as the adoption of equality law (so-called anti-discrimination law) highly mediatized in the society, Moldova was the first state in the EaP to meet all the criteria of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan.

On June 27, 2014, in Brussels, together with Ukraine and Georgia, the Republic of Moldova signed the AA with the EU. The Moldovan Parliament ratified the AA on July 2, 2014.<sup>2</sup> The AA officially entered into force as of January 1, 2016, after being ratified by all EU states. From

the moment the negotiations started and until the signing of the AA, the Republic of Moldova passed through some difficult institutional reforms, carrying out a series of reforms and legislative changes that brought Moldova closer to the EU institutional rules. AA replaced the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), raising to a higher level the institutional relationship of the Republic of Moldova with the EU. Unlike the PCA, AA is a more complex document, which regulates the relations of the Republic of Moldova with the EU in various fields, the implementation of which should have a final goal modernizing and democratizing the country.

### *Implementation of the Association Agreement.*

The priorities of the AA implementation are established through the Association Agenda negotiated by the Government of the Republic of Moldova with the European Commission. On June 26, 2014, the EU-Moldova Association Agenda for the years 2014-2016 was adopted. The second RM - EU Association Agenda for the years 2017-2019 was adopted on August 19, 2017. AA is a complex and multidimensional document, which contains mandatory provisions, regulatory norms and cooperation arrangements. At the domestic level, the tool for implementing the AA provisions is the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Moldova - EU Association Agreement (PNAAA). On October 7, 2014, the Government approved the PNAAA for the years 2014-2016, and on December 30, 2016 - the PNAAA for 2017-2019. The PNAAA indicates the deadlines for the

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 259/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of April 3, 2014 amending the Council Regulation (EC) No 391/2001 establishing the list of third countries whose nationals must hold visas for crossing external borders and the list of third countries whose nationals are exempted from this obligation.

<sup>2</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32014R0259&from=RO>

<sup>3</sup> Law no. 112 of 02.07.2014 for the ratification of the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova, on the one hand, and the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, on the other.

<sup>4</sup> <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=353829>

completion of the Republic of Moldova's commitments in accordance with the AA and the institutions responsible for implementing the actions. Moldova - EU institutional cooperation is carried out using several platforms, the EU - Moldova Association Council being the hierarchically - superior Moldovan - Community institution.

## Challenges

***Lack of progress in carrying out reforms in key areas.*** In implementing AA, the Republic of Moldova recorded substantial backlogs. The report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEU) on the quantitative realization of the PNAAA for the years 2014-2016 attests an implementation in the proportion of 73.73%, the rate of harmonization of the national legislation with the *acquis communautaire* provided by the Agreement being of 34% from the whole number of EU acts.<sup>3</sup> Alternative reports on the implementation of AA made by civil society show a lower percentage than the one announced by MFAEU - 63.1% of the actions of the first PNAAA being accomplished. The implementation of the AA provisions in practice consists of two distinct stages: 1) the (quantitative) transposition of European acts into the national legislation and 2) the (qualitative) implementation in practice of the new legislation adopted. In the transposition chapter, we attest, although with some delays, a good reflection of the European acts in the national legislation. The challenges appear in the implementation chapter, on which de-

pends the positive results to be issued by the AA for the Republic of Moldova.

The impediments in the implementation of AA by the RM can be explained by technical problems, which require time to be removed. Problematic was the implementation of qualitative reforms in key areas, which can be explained by the lack of political will. From the interviews conducted with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, could be concluded that often important bills for the implementation of the AA were not a priority for the parliamentary factions, their adoption being unjustifiably delayed. The lack of political will was more visible in the key areas impeding the success of the reforms in justice and the fight against corruption. The most important political message that came from Brussels in the period 2009-2019 regarding the internal policy of the Republic of Moldova referred to the justice reform and the fight against corruption (the Republic of Moldova is ranked 117 out of 180 in the 2018 corruption perception index). Without progress in reforming these areas Moldova will not be able to advance in the political dialogue with the EU.

***The banking crisis.*** By signing the AA, Moldova has taken more commitments in relation to the EU. In the first year of AA implementation, the Republic of Moldova went through a political crisis and a large bank fraud. Consequently, the declared pro-European political parties in government have drastically decreased in the preferences of the electorate, the negative image of the EIA components having a direct reflection on the popularity of the EU

<sup>3</sup> Progress report on the level of implementation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement Republic of Moldova - European Union 2014-2016. / <https://mfa.gov.md/ro/content/rapoarte-aa>

among the population. According to the data of the Barometer of Public Opinion (BOP), the EU decreased in the preferences of the population from 67% in July 2009 to 40% in March 2015.<sup>4</sup> After the banking crisis, the EU suspended the budget support granted to Moldova. In order to unlock the macro-financial assistance granted to Moldova, the EU introduced at the end of 2017 the conditionality policy in its relationship with Chisinau. The EU and the Republic of Moldova signed a memorandum of understanding<sup>5</sup> in November 2017 according to which in order to re-activate the budget support assistance (in the amount of 100 million euros), the Government of Chisinau was to carry out a series of actions agreed with the EU. These actions refer to the implementation of reforms in the following areas:

- governance of the public and financial sector;
- the fight against corruption and money laundering;
- energy sector reforms;
- business climate and implementation of the DCFTA.

***The deterioration of democracy and the rule of law.*** The Moldovan government consciously did not comply with the provisions of the November 2017 memorandum, registering in 2018 political and legal democratic downfalls, the state institutions being overly politicized. The degradation of the Moldovan democracy became visible after the invalidation of the elections in Chisinau municipality. On July 5, 2018, the European Parliament adopted a resolution<sup>6</sup> providing for the suspension of the macro-financial assistance for the Republic of Moldova due to the failure to comply with the political preconditions stipulated in the memorandum between the EU and the Republic of Moldova signed at the end of 2017. Restoring democracy and

4 Public Opinion Barometer. Institute of Public Policy. / <http://ipp.md/sectiuni/barometrul-opinii-publice/>

5 Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of Moldova and the National Bank of Moldova as a financial agent of the beneficiary and the European Union. / <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=373730>

6 European Parliament resolution of July 5th, 2018 on

Table No. 1 Financial assistance provided by the EU to the Republic of Moldova (2009 -2018)

Area	Amount Million Euros
DCFTA	36,0
Agriculture	73,6
Economy and business development	57,0
Energy	78,8
Transport and infrastructure	174,5
Environment and sustainable development	68,6
Justice and Police	83,7
Others	47,6
Total	619,8

Source: The platform of EU-funded technical assistance projects in the Republic of Moldova ([www.eu4md.ro](http://www.eu4md.ro))

Table No. 2 The exports and imports of the Republic of Moldova into the EU (2009 - 2018)

Year	Exports		Imports	
	mil. Dollars USD	%	mil. Dollars USD	%
2009	678,5	51,9	1422,5	43,4
2010	746,5	47,2	1704,2	44,2
2011	1087,0	48,8	2256,6	43,5
2012	1013,4	46,9	2318,7	44,5
2013	1140,9	46,8	2472,8	45,0
2014	1246,0	53,3	2567,7	48,3
2015	1217,6	61,9	1954,1	49,0
2016	1 332,4	65,1	1 973,7	49,09
2017	1596,9	65,8	2389,1	49,45
2018	1862,1	68,8	2 851,7	49,47

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova ([www.statistica.gov.md](http://www.statistica.gov.md))

the rule of law by depoliticizing the state institutions is the fundamental condition set forward by the EU in order to relaunch the Moldovan - Community dialogue in a constructive dynamic.

## Economic and trade cooperation

**Financial assistance.** The EU is the largest donor of the Republic of Moldova, providing financial assistance to support political and economic reforms and providing humanitarian aid. Between 2007 and 2013, the EU assisted the Republic of Moldova through the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), and from 2014 to 2020 through the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENPI). EU assistance has focused on the justice, economy, and education sectors. The energy field is a strategic one in the Moldovan - Community relationship, the EU allocating to the

Republic of Moldova financial resources for energy interconnection as well as for energy and transport infrastructure. The EU financially assists numerous thematic packages in the Republic of Moldova, supporting civil society and local public administration, investing in numerous infrastructure projects.

**DCFTA.** The EU is the main trading partner of Moldova, the percentage of exports being almost 70% and of the imports around 50%. Over the last 10 years, the sum of Moldovan exports to the EU countries has been, with some minor exceptions, constantly increasing. This amount has increased about three times - from \$ 678.5 million to nearly \$ 1.9 billion. The EU countries where Moldova exports the most are Romania (29.27%), Italy (11.44%) and Germany (8.12%). In comparison, Russia's share in the geography of Moldovan exports in 2018 was 8.08%, Moldova exporting to CIS countries in the amount of US \$ 416 million.

the political crisis in Moldova following the invalidation of local elections in Chisinau (2018/2783 (RSP)).

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0303\\_RO.html?redirect](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0303_RO.html?redirect)

DCFTA is the instrument that applied progressively contributes to the stimulation and creation of the necessary conditions for the growth of Moldovan exports to EU countries. Since the beginning of the DCFTA implementation, Moldovan exports on the EU market have increased by approximately \$ 678.5 million. Speaking of foreign trade, this is the most visible results of the AA implementation between Moldova and the EU. The leading EU member states where Moldovan goods are exported are the following: Romania, Italy Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The main products exported to the European market are: machinery and equipment, textile products, agricultural products, beverages, iron and steel.

DCFTA has a positive impact on increasing the quality of Moldovan products. Moldovan producers wishing to export to the EU market without customs duties must implement the Community standards. The application of standards contributes to the increase of competitiveness and diversification of Moldovan products that are exported to EU countries.

## Challenges

### *Concentration of Moldovan exports.*

Although since the implementation of DCFTA the volume of Moldovan trade in the EU has increased, there are some barriers that do not allow the volume of these exports to be higher. A first problematic issue is the reduced diversity of Moldovan products exported to the EU. Only a few types of goods are exported to the Community market. In particular, we are talking about sunflower seeds,

wheat, wines and corn. For other products, Moldova is not able to capitalize on the volume of tariff quotas agreed with the EU, such as fresh apples or tomatoes. The tariff quotas of some products (for example, garlic and grape juice) have not been capitalized at all.

Another problematic aspect of Moldovan products is the restricted geographical area in the countries where they are exported. Agri-food products are mainly oriented to three markets (Romania, Italy and the United Kingdom), and more than half of the industrial ones are oriented to a single market - Romania. A priority for the Republic of Moldova is to succeed in obtaining the acceptance for the export of animal products to the EU, currently from this category Republic of Moldova exports to the EU market only honey and caviar.

*Low technological level.* The concentration of exports can be explained by the limited technological capabilities of our country. Moldova lacks quality infrastructure, which does not allow the export of a larger number of Moldovan agri-food products on the Community market. There are Moldovan producers that meet the quality criteria for export to the EU, but there is no infrastructure required to test their goods. In particular, this refers to goods of animal origin. The National Agency for Food Safety (ANSA) does not have laboratories and testing centers in line with EU requirements.

The low technological level can also be deduced from the analysis of the categories of agri-food and industrial products exported to the EU, which constitutes over 90% of the total exports. About 75%



of agri-food exports are primary products, with a minimum or zero level of processing. All industrial exports are processed by simple, or even non-mechanical (so-called low tech) technologies. The reduced technological capacities of the Republic of Moldova can also be deduced from the fact that primary products such as sunflower, wheat, fruits are exported, but there are no exports with a higher level of processing such as sunflower oil, bakery products and pastry, fruit juices. Another indicator is the fact that over half of the industrial products exported do not have the origin of the Republic of Moldova, they are included in the category of re-exports. The low level of competitiveness of industrial products explains the fact that more than half of Moldovan industrial exports to the EU are directed to only one country - Romania (52% in 2018).

## Mobility and people to people contact

*The liberalized visa regime.* Delivering tangible results for Moldovan citizens is one of the EU's priorities in relation to Moldova. The consolidation of human capital is fundamental for the future development of the relationship between the EU and Moldova. The component of the liberalized visa regime is important for the Moldovan - Community dialogue. Since April 28, 2014, citizens of the Republic of Moldova, holders of biometric passports, have been granted the right to travel without visas in the EU. The Republic of Moldova achieved this breakthrough following the implementation of the conditionalities stipulated in the Visa liberalization action plan. Five years after the entry into force of the visa-free re-

gime more than 2 million Moldovan citizens traveled to the Schengen area, and the total number of state border crossings in the European area during this period was over 6 million.

*Mobility Partnership.* Moldova signed on June 5, 2008 the Joint Declaration on the Mobility Partnership Republic of Moldova - EU, being one of the first pilot states in this program. The Mobility Partnership is an instrument based on political dialogue, designed for an indefinite period, through which the EU offers a flexible and balanced framework for carrying out actions on 3 dimensions of the Global Migration Approach: 1) migration and development; 2) legal migration; 3) combating illegal migration. The purpose of this program is to facilitate the reintegration of Moldovan migrants returning, voluntarily or forcibly, from the EU into the internal labor market and to encourage those wishing to migrate to the EU to use legal means. After 10 years of enforcement, Moldova implemented over 100 projects through the Mobility Partnership program.

*Education, research and culture.* Moldova's citizens have the opportunity to participate in various European programs in the fields of education, research and culture. The Erasmus + program brings together seven EU programs in the field of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020. The EaP countries are eligible to apply to most of the actions of the Erasmus + program, the Republic of Moldova being its largest beneficiary. In the years 2015-2019 about 2500 students and teachers benefited from the provisions of the Erasmus + program, and an-

other 3,000 were involved in different informal educational projects. The Republic of Moldova is the first state within the EaP which, starting July 1, 2014, participates in the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation program with over 5 million euros funding. In the field of culture, Moldova joined the EU program “Creative Europe” in 2015. Within this program, the Republic of Moldova fully participates in the culture component and in the media component at 20% scale.

**Civil society.** For effective communication with citizens, the EU supports civil society. Right from the moment of the launch of EaP, the idea of a Civil Society Forum (CSF) comprising the EaP countries was supported. At the EaP Summit in Prague in May 2009, the conceptual document of the CSF was adopted. The purpose of the CSF is to facilitate contacts between civil society organizations in the EaP countries and to intensify the dialogue with the public authorities in the respective countries to contribute to the transformation, reformation and modernization of the EaP societies. At the EaP summit held in Brussels in 2017, the “20 deliverables for 2020” were adopted, which are intended to generate tangible results for citizens. Through the 20 deliverables the EU has set out to develop, in time, a complex mechanism of interaction with the EaP countries through direct communication with civil society, so that it becomes more effective in communicating with the state institutions, capable of imposing policies on the authorities.

## Challenges

The well-being of citizens has not improved. The EU has provided in the last 10 years lots of contributions for Moldovan citizens. Moldovan citizens have more opportunities and benefits compared to 2009 due to the EU, but their perception of the process of bringing Moldova closer to the EU has remained in many respects the same. The explanation is that the standard of living and personal well-being did not change much after the Republic of Moldova signed the AA. In order for the impact to be greater, it is necessary to accelerate the economic development of the country which is possible only after the macro - political reforms on justice and the fight against corruption will be achieved.

Citizens are not aware of the benefits. On the other hand, many of the benefits that Moldovan citizens enjoy are taken for granted or they are not aware that these benefits were possible with EU support. Other benefits are indirect and foresee a medium and long term planning, such as, for example, the EU's support for the energy sector and infrastructure, which are hardly tangible for Moldovan citizens. To fill this gap in the Moldovan society, mass media campaigns about the importance of EU support to Moldovan citizens are needed.



## Conclusions and recommendations

Moldova started in 2009 the process of political association and economic integration with the EU within the institutional policy of the EaP. After 10 of Moldovan - Community dialogue in this EU project, from which 5 years of AA implementation, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- the political dialogue has undergone evolutions and involutions. The involutions were caused by the lack of political will of the Chisinau authorities to carry out reforms that would lead to the functioning of the state institutions, in particular, the reform of the justice and the fight against corruption;
- the Republic of Moldova is in full process of economic integration to the community space through the instrument made available namely the DCFTA, which 5 years after its implementation has strongly connected Moldova to the EU;
- the liberalized visa regime with the EU and the horizontal programs in various fields offer Moldovan citizens numerous perspectives to connect to the European circuit, but also to bring the experience gained in the EU in the Moldovan society.

**For the following years, commitments from the Republic of Moldova are required in order to increase political association with the EU, but also to increase the welfare of citizens:**

- to demonstrate political will in the process of full-fledged justice reform and intensification of the fight against corruption, as well as the fulfillment of all commitments in all areas taken under the AA;

- to consolidate the continuous increase of the commercial volumes of the Moldovan exports on the EU market by diversifying the goods and removing the technical barriers by increasing the technological level in the production process;
- to increase the degree of internal democratization of the Republic of Moldova by involving civil society in the decision-making process, ensuring freedom of expression and plurality of the media.

**For this, the following actions are a priority:**

- depoliticizing state institutions based on the functioning of laws and observance of procedural rules. Appointment of apolitical or non-party persons as heads of state institutions;
- reform of the justice system. Ensuring independence, efficiency, transparency and accountability of the judiciary and anti-corruption institutions. The prosecution reform and the fight against corruption are the priority measures in the reform of the judicial system. The promotion of judges must be based on merits and transparent recruitment;
- manifestation of the will in the impartial investigation of the 2014 financial fraud that affected the banking system. The aim of the investigation should focus on bringing those responsible for fraud to justice and recovery of the diverted funds. Securing the legislation to prevent money laundering in line with the European one will create the legal framework needed to avoid such situations in the future;
- development of an efficient and transparent regulatory framework for the business environment, by guaranteeing equal rights for businesses and business people. Improve the transparency of the public

procurement sector by implementing the law in force;

- the energy connection of the Republic of Moldova to the EU by connecting to the Romanian gas and electricity systems. Liberalization of the energy market in Moldova through its demonopolization. Implementation of new energy laws and fulfillment of commitments made by the Republic of Moldova within the European Energy Community;
- carrying out the reform of the public administration in order to improve the public services and the management of public finances. Creating more employment opportunities at local and regional level with the aim to increase the citizens' standard of living;
- increasing the degree of completeness of the Moldovan exports to the

EU and widening the geographical area of their spread in the community area by creating mechanisms for the development of the processing industry (including primary) and increasing the degree of technological capacities of the Moldovan economy. Achieving quality standards in line with EU requirements and organizing campaigns to promote Moldovan products on European markets;

- increasing the degree of transparency of the decision-making act by involving the civil society. Demonopolize the media market and create conditions for the development of media institutions independence. This would contribute to ensuring the pluralism of opinion and to the correct and equidistant information of Moldovan citizens.

## The bilateral relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania

### Political dialogue

*Relaunching political dialogue.* In 2009, relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania entered a new stage of evolution. The new government from Chisinau - EIA - has declared the objective of European integration of the Republic of Moldova as a priority. In the new political circumstances of the Republic of Moldova, the Moldovan - Romanian bilateral relations entered a stage of stability and constant dialogue on several levels of cooperation. The evolution of the institutional framework of the Moldovan - Romanian bilateral relations in the last decade resulted from the Joint Declaration setting up the Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of

Moldova for European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, signed in Bucharest, on April 27, 2010.

The document contains 3 dimensions of Moldovan - Romanian cooperation to support the European course of the Republic of Moldova: political, economic and cultural. On the political dimension, the two states have agreed to establish a structured cooperation framework to support the accession of Moldova to the EU, in practical terms supported by a Government Action Plan. The Moldovan - Romanian institutional collaboration was deepened using the format of joint government meetings, a format which allowed partnerships to be promoted in various fields. In total, 4 joint government meetings have been held so far:

- March 3, 2012 - in Iasi;
- September 22, 2015 - in Neptune;
- March 23, 2017 - at Piatra Neamț;
- November 22, 2018 - in Bucharest.

***The dimensions of Moldovan - Romanian cooperation.*** During these joint meetings of the governments, in addition to expressing gratitude and mutual support between the two states, concrete actions were taken by signing bilateral agreements in various fields and offering loans granted to Moldova by Romania. At the first joint meeting of the two Cabinet of Ministers, the Action Plan was signed between the Government of Romania and the Government of the Republic of Moldova for the implementation of the Joint Declaration<sup>7</sup> and an agreement was reached regarding the unfolding of the sessions of the Joint Commission for European Integration and the Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation. Between 2012-2018 there were 5 meetings of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission for European Integration, and between 2010-2018 the Joint Intergovernmental Commission for economic cooperation met 7 times.

During the years 2009-2019, the relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania was based on two major aspects:

- the European dimension of bilateral cooperation, based on the strategic objective of 'Moldova' integration into the EU;
- highlighting the special character of the Moldovan-Romanian relations,

based on the linguistic identity, history and common culture.

During this period, the pragmatic side of the Moldovan-Romanian relations prevailed being determined by the strategic objective of the Republic of Moldova to integrate into the EU. Romania's approach is to contribute to the Republic of Moldova's irreversible course of European integration, but also to ensure an area of stability and security at its eastern border. Moldova has naturally and organically accepted the support given by Romania in achieving its strategic objective, greatly benefiting from its relations with the neighboring country.

## Challenges

***The divergences caused by the institutions of the presidency.*** The close and constant dialogue between Chisinau and Bucharest at the level of the governments did not rule out the presence of political problems in the relations between Moldova and Romania, caused by other political institutions. The institution of the presidency, both in Bucharest and in Chisinau, at certain time intervals has caused certain political divergences between the two countries. These divergences can be explained by the personal profile, political beliefs and cultural-values of certain presidents. In some situations, the unionist statements of Traian Basescu and those of the position of the anti-Romanian Moldovan Igor Dodon created interpersonal animosities in the political dialogue between Moldova and Romania.

<sup>7</sup> Action Plan between the Government of Romania and the Government of the Republic of Moldova for the implementation of the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova for the European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, signed in Bucharest, April

27, 2010. / <http://www.mae.ro/tratate-bilaterales>

**The party nature of Moldovan-Romanian relations.** Another problematic aspect of the political relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania was the fact that, in many situations, they were influenced by the inter-party links, or even by the relations between the Moldovan and Romanian politicians. The party line played an important role in the period 2016-2019, when the Moldovan-Romanian governmental relationship was determined by the relationship between the two ruling parties - the Social Democratic Party in Romania and the Democratic Party of Moldova. The two governing parties, in several situations, ignored the state interests of Romania and the Republic of Moldova and supported each other, being guided by party interests.

## Economic cooperation

**Development of the bilateral legal-economic framework.** According to the Joint Declaration of April 2010, in order to im-

plement the relevant economic policies, the two countries have agreed to develop the legal framework of bilateral economic relations. For the institutional consolidation of the economic cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and Romania it was decided to extend the activity of the joint intergovernmental commissions, through which the economic projects and programs between the two states were coordinated. The joint commission for economic cooperation represents the institutionalized mechanism of bilateral cooperation on the economic level, coordinated by the ministers of economy of the two countries.

**Energy interconnection.** The Joint Declaration pays special attention to energy cooperation, in particular energy interconnections in the natural gas and electricity sectors. According to the Action Plan of the declaration adopted on March 3, 2012, the interconnection natural gas pipeline system project Iași-Ungheni was

Table No. 3 Exports and imports between Republic of Moldova and Romania (2009-2018)

Year	Exports		Imports	
	Million USD	%	Million USD	%
2009	239,6	18,6	311,7	9,5
2010	246,4	16,0	386,7	10,0
2011	376,4	17,0	574,3	11,1
2012	356,7	16,5	620,6	11,9
2013	411,1	16,9	722,1	13,1
2014	434,0	18,6	803,1	15,1
2015	446,4	22,7	555,1	13,9
2016	513,0	25,09	551,5	13,72
2017	600,6	24,77	694,5	14,38
2018	792,1	29,27	838,2	14,54

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova ([www.statistica.gov.md](http://www.statistica.gov.md))

planned to be finalized by August 27, 2014. The functionality of the Iași-Ungheni gas pipeline is symbolic. In order to become fully functional at the next stage, it is necessary to extend the gas pipeline to Chisinau on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and the construction of the Onești-Lețcani gas pipeline with the compression station on the territory of Romania.

On May 21, 2015, in Chisinau, the Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Government of Romania regarding the implementation of the projects necessary for the interconnection of the natural gas and electricity networks in the Republic of Moldova and Romania.<sup>8</sup> The Iasi-Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline is a strategic project for the Republic of Moldova. In order to achieve this, the Romanian state was involved through the SNTGN Transgaz SA company, the main shareholder of which is the Ministry of Economy of Romania. The company took over the construction of the gas pipeline to Chisinau. The completion of the Iași-Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline construction is planned for 2020.

**Commercial relations.** The economic integration of the Republic of Moldova into the Community market has contributed to the deepening of the Moldovan-Romanian trade-economic relations. Since 2009, the volume of trade between the two states has been steadily increasing. During this period, Moldovan exports to Romania increased approximately 3.5

times, and imports almost 3 times. Since 2014, Romania has become the first trading partner of the Republic of Moldova.

**Financial assistance.** The financial assistance that Romania provided to the Republic of Moldova was also part of the economic cooperation between the two countries. On April 27, 2010, in Bucharest, was signed the Agreement between the Government of Romania and the Government of the Republic of Moldova on the implementation of the technical and financial assistance program based on a non-reimbursable financial assistance of 100 million euros granted by Romania to the Republic of Moldova. The parties agreed that the agreement should develop cooperation in the transport infrastructure and educational units, subsequently supplemented with humanitarian assistance in emergency situations and with the energy sector. As for development cooperation policy, Moldova represents priority no.1 receiving most of the development assistance provided by Romania through the International Development Cooperation Agency (RoAid).

Romania supported Moldova when it had problems with the financial assistance from abroad. In 2015, when the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Commission stopped the macro-financial assistance granted to the Republic of Moldova, at the second joint meeting of the governments, the two countries agreed upon the conditions of a repayable financial assistance Agreement worth 150 million euros granted by Romania to the Republic of Moldova.

<sup>8</sup> Order of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration no.1298-T-12 of 05.11.2015 regarding the entry into force and the ceasing of some international treaties. / <http://lex.justice.md/md/361877/>

## Challenges

**Lack of major economic projects.** Moldova and Romania have agreed to work towards interconnection of infrastructures and their integration within the transport and telecommunications networks in the European space, taking into account the commitments with the European Union. In a longer term, the parties agreed to implement the following bilateral projects:

- completion of the electricity interconnection project by launching the Isaccea-Vulcănești and Suceava-Bălți power lines;
- the construction of the European railway track 1435 MM from Ungheni station to Chisinau station;

- construction of road bridges over the river Prut near the localities of Iași-Ungheni and Bumbăta-Leova;
- implementation of international roaming at national rates between Moldova and Romania;

Among these projects the topic of roaming was largely discussed but not finalized due to the Republic of Moldova's back end rates which are approximately 20 times higher than in Romania. The electricity interconnection between Republic of Moldova and Romania is only at the project phase of the Isaccea-Vulcănești power line. All the other strategic projects of the Moldovan-Romanian relations, against the optimistic promises, the authorities of the two states did not take

Table No. 4 The disbursed amounts out of the 100 million euros non-reimbursable financial assistance granted to the Republic of Moldova (2014-2018)

Date	Project name	Sum euro
20.02.2014	The interconnection pipeline between the Romanian national gas transmission system and the Republic of Moldova's gas transmission system on the Iasi-Ungheni direction	1 205 634,90
16.04.2014	Education units	19 922 505,57
08.08.2014	The interconnection pipeline between the Romanian national gas transmission system and the Republic of Moldova's gas transmission system on the Iasi-Ungheni direction	1 270 734,44
19.12.2014	The interconnection pipeline between the Romanian national gas transmission system and the Republic of Moldova's gas transmission system on the Iasi-Ungheni direction	2 738 462,50
07.11.2016	Preschool institutions in the Republic of Moldova (kindergarten renovation program)	3 000 000,00
17.11.2016	The technical project necessary for the construction of the Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline	550 000,00
23.12.2016	Automation and Management Center (dispatching) from Ungheni within the Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline	350 000,00
21.12.2018	School infrastructure in the Republic of Moldova	3 000 000,00
Total		32 037 337,41

Source: Request nr.2087B/04-12-2018 ([www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/interpelari.home](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/interpelari.home))



concrete actions. The implementation of these projects is very important for the economic connection of the Republic of Moldova to Romania, and through the neighboring state to the European economic circuit as well.

***Inability to use the non-repayable loan.*** The Government of the Republic of Moldova managed to make use of only 32 million euros from the program of non-reimbursable financial assistance, in the amount of 100 million euros, granted by Romania. The money is granted only on concrete development projects, the Moldovan authorities being unable to absorb all this money. So far, out of the 100 million euros granted by Romania only 32 million euros were disbursed.

## Cultural relation

***The institutional framework.*** The cooperation in the cultural-educational field is a very important one for the two countries, Romania offering large assistance to the Republic of Moldova in this field. In the 2010 Joint Declaration, the enlargement of Moldovan-Romanian relations in the field of culture, science and education is planned based on European standards. The basis of cooperation between the two countries in these areas is a bilateral agreement signed in 1992.<sup>9</sup>

***Cooperation in education.*** Traditionally, Romania annually allocates to the Republic of Moldova scholarships (about 5 thousand) in pre-university, university and post-university educational levels. Starting with 2014, through the 100 million euros non-reimbursable aid program of

technical and financial assistance, agreed on April 27, 2010, Romania has made a major contribution to the renovation and modernization of the preschool institutions in the Republic of Moldova. Until December 31, 2018, the amount redeemed from the first tranche of the grant offered by Romania was 19.1 million euros and 2.9 million euros from the second tranche. The beneficiaries of the grant offered by Romanian were 836 kindergartens from the Republic of Moldova. For school institutions, Romania has donated, on several occasions, school minibuses for secondary schools and high schools throughout the Republic of Moldova.

***Cultural cooperation.*** In 2010, the Romanian Cultural Institute opened a branch in Chisinau - the Romanian Cultural Institute “Mihai Eminescu”. The activity of this institute, the opening of which was not possible until 2009, focuses on encouraging and supporting the Romanian cultural events in the Republic of Moldova. It carries out projects in all the important sectors of the culture: theater, film, visual arts, socio-human sciences, music, folk art and ethnography, literature etc. The cultural relations between the two countries are also developed at inter-ministerial level between the line ministries.

## Challenges

***Information insufficiency.*** The relations in the field of culture between the two countries have undergone an institutional development after 2009. Speaking about public

<sup>9</sup> Agreement no.1992 of 19.05.1992 between the

Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Government of Romania on collaboration in the fields of science, education and culture. / <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=357614>

presence, many of the Romanian projects and programs implemented in the Republic of Moldova have not been reported in the public space to their true value. In the Joint Declaration of April 2010, the media sector cooperation between the two states was to be expanded. The Romanian – Republic of Moldova joint information space is one of the priorities of the Ministry of Romanianians everywhere. In 2016, the initiative of setting up the Mass-Media Advisory Council was launched. This initiative, which has not yet been fully implemented, will constitute the institutional framework for capitalizing on the opportunities offered by bilateral cooperation in the media field by transposing European norms and applying common standards of good practice.

***The Romanian media projects in the Republic of Moldova.*** One of the most discussed topics was that of the Romanian public television (TVR) broadcasting license in the Republic of Moldova, which was discontinued by the Moldovan authorities in 2007. Following the dialogue with the Moldovan authorities, on December 1, 2013, the Romanian Television Company launched TVR grid for Moldova. Previously, on December 1, 2011, the Romanian Broadcasting Society began broadcasting in the Republic of Moldova using the local Radio Chisinau station. The Romanian state has financially supported various local media sources in the Republic of Moldova. Ideally, these media sources should contribute to maintaining and promoting the Romanian cultural and linguistic identity on the left bank of the Prut River. In practical terms, the credibility of many of these Romanian language media outlets have been suffering in terms of credibility and independence, and they are politically partisan.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Since 2009, the Moldovan-Romanian dialogue has been constant and constantly developing. The Moldovan-Romanian relations between the two states became special, during the years 2009-2019 they were characterized by the following:

- *the Moldovan-Romanian political dialogue was an effective one at the level of governments, based on economic pragmatism, the ideological-political divergences passing on the secondary level;*
- *the economic and trade cooperation gradually became a fundamental one for the Moldovan-Romanian bilateral relations, changing the accents of the institutional dialogue between the two countries. Romania became Republic of Moldova's first trade partner. The strategic project of energy interconnection of the Republic of Moldova to the European energy system through Romania started;*
- *the cultural-historical component of the Moldovan-Romanian relations continued to play an important role, their special nature being determined by many programs and projects that Romania has in the Republic of Moldova.*

**In order to consolidate the Moldovan-Romanian dialogue further it is recommended:**

- *at political level, deepening the intergovernmental dialogue based on economic cooperation and cultural-historical projects through a better institutionalization of it in order to avoid certain political divergences caused by the party and personal factors;*



- *at economic level, the development of economic projects of great magnitude. Fulfilment of the strategic project on energy interconnection between the Republic of Moldova and Romania, as well as of other strategic railway and road projects that will contribute to the economic connection of the Republic of Moldova to the EU through Romania;*
- *at the cultural-historical level, it is necessary to increase Romania's informational space throughout the Republic of Moldova for reasons of existing affinities between the two countries, but also for a better awareness about Romania's support and contribution to the increase of the Republic of Moldova welfare state.*

**In order to achieve these recommendations, the following concrete actions must be taken:**

- *completion and commissioning of the Iași-Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline;*
- *the launch of the Isaccea-Vulcănești power lines, as a first stage, and of the Suceava-Balti power line, as a second stage. In a longer term, the construction of the Iași-Strășeni power line;*
- *construction of the railway line with European gauge from Ungheni to Chisinau;*
- *construction of road bridges over the River Prut near Iași-Ungheni and Bumbăta-Leova. Initiation of new projects, in addition to the two already discussed regarding construction of bridges over the River Prut. A future road bridge over the River Prut in the localities Fălciu-Cantemir would facilitate the trade between two countries which in the last years grows continuously;*
- *connecting the Republic of Moldova to the major European routes through Romania. The construction of the Cluj-Târgu-Mureș-Iași highway with the Ungheni-Chisinau extension is a strategic one for the Republic of Moldova. The construction of the Iași-Ungheni road bridge is part of this highway. Another route that would connect Moldova to European arteries would be DN24A Bîrlad-Huși, the connection being made through the construction of the Bumbăta-Leova road bridge. The Huși-Leova route would contribute to the formation of the regional transport corridor Leova-Cimișlia-Basarabasca-Căușeni-Ștefan Voda-Odessa (Ukraine);*
- *creation of favorable conditions for the expansion of the Romanian business environment in the Republic of Moldova by harmonizing the investment environment of the two countries. The consolidation of the Romanian business environment in the Republic of Moldova is a natural necessity in order to increase the trade balance between the two countries;*
- *the broadcasting of TVR Moldova on air via national waves and the broadcasting of Radio Chisinau throughout the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Opening of new television and radio stations, periodicals and Romanian news portals in the Republic of Moldova. Entrance to the media market in Moldova of Romanian media trusts;*
- *implementation of international roaming at national rates between Moldova and Romania.*

# The Moldovan-Ukrainian relations in the context of euro integration policy dynamics

**Natalia Stercul**

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EU enlargement to the East led to an increase in political and ideological discussions around the fate of the post-Soviet states. The new European neighbors, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, were at a crossroads between adopting a Western course of development and preserving traditional Russian influence. The issue of the fundamental guidelines of their foreign policy was aggravated by geopolitical contradictions around the future of these states at the level of EU-Russia relations. The dilemma of choice has shaped, to some extent, the path to the beginning of internal socio-political transformations in these countries.

The Prague Summit, held on May 7th, 2009, marked the beginning of the Eastern Partnership project, the goal of which was to create the necessary conditions for accelerating political association and economic integration between the European Union and partner countries. This initiative marked the beginning of the process of modernization of states and the implementation of systemic reforms. By signing the Association Agreement with the EU, which includes the creation of a deep and comprehensive free trade zone (DCFTA), the states managed to become associate members of the EU and receive a visa-free regime. All this left its mark on the Moldovan-Ukrainian relations, united by a common European integration policy.

## The dynamics of bilateral political dialogue

Moldovan-Ukrainian relations, despite the presence of certain difficulties in the bilateral dialogue, are characterized by stability, friendliness and goodwill. Their evolution is due to the deep historical ties that unite Moldova and Ukraine. Over the period of bilateral cooperation, more than 150 documents have been signed that regulate good neighborly relations. In 2019, the two countries celebrated the 27th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties.

Ukraine has always supported the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova, acted as a guarantor and mediator in the process of settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. At the same time, changes of political elites and spirits over the past decade, as well as internal political instability, a low level of development of democracy, oligarchic regimes, a virtual absence of political dialogue between the Presidents of the states, inconsistent actions of power structures on both sides, and continued political distrust complicated the bilateral relationship.

The complexity of the political relations between the two neighboring states was due to various reasons and factors, including internal political crises, however, the complete lack of dialogue between the President of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon and former President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko was caused

by the statements of I. Dodon regarding the Crimean affiliation. As a result, the political dialogue between the Presidents was at the lowest point in the history of Moldovan-Ukrainian relations. At the same time, the regular contacts of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova with the authorities of Ukraine allowed achieving pragmatic cooperation in many areas.

This is connected often with the personal friendly relations of P. Poroshenko and Vladimir Plahotniuc, the leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova, and their joint business interests, which lay at the basis of close cooperation between the parties. The positive cycle of bilateral relations between the states was continued by the new Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova Maia Sandu, who, a month after her appointment, paid her first official visit to Kiev on July 17th, 2019, where she met the newly elected President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky. They discussed issues related to regional security and European integration, as well as the bilateral agenda for subsequent joint cooperation. The meeting between I. Dodon and V. Zelensky has not yet taken place, despite the agreement reached during their joint telephone conversation, as it was criticized by experts and civil society in Ukraine.

The key date for the two states to recognize the new realities for regional development was 2014. The aggravation of relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation as a result of the annexation of Crimea and the war in the east of Ukraine pushed both states towards a more active rapprochement with the West. Issues of

regional security and reaction to new challenges and threats contributed to the unity of the positions of the states on a whole range of issues, including with respect to the Transnistrian region. On October 7th, 2017, an Agreement on joint border control on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border was signed.<sup>10</sup>

The symmetrical actions of Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities became a defining characteristic for the creation of joint control points. A special role in this process belongs to the EUBAM mission, supported by the European Commission, whose activities are focused on improving the protection level of the Transnistrian segment of the border. The achieved results were expressed in reducing the level of smuggling by increasing the efficiency of customs control, developing appropriate standards for cross-border assistance and improving the professional skills of the border services of Moldova and Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

The involvement of the European factor in the political dialogue between 2009 and 2019 is the main distinguishing feature of relations between Moldova and Ukraine, which influenced the intensification of contacts at the highest level, the demonstration of regional solidarity and the beginning of building relations in the spirit of pragmatism. At the same time, the lack of certainty and clarity in the

<sup>10</sup> Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on joint control of persons, vehicles, goods and objects at joint border crossing points of the state Moldovan-Ukrainian border // <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=372414>

<sup>11</sup> European Union Border Assistance Mission. Annual Report 2016 // <http://eubam.org/publications/eubam-annual-report-2016/>

foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova, the differentiation of positions on the geopolitical principle and the desire to be simultaneously involved in opposing geo-economic projects have caused concern of the Ukrainian side and continue to have a destructive effect on the general context of bilateral political relations.

## Trade, economic and energy cooperation

Ukraine has the role of the main trading partner of the Republic of Moldova and ranks third after Romania and Russia. In 2018, Moldova entered the TOP-30 trading partners of Ukraine and the TOP-20 promising markets, which are determined by the State Export Strategy of Ukraine for the period until 2021.

The dynamics of the trade balance for the period 2009-2018 varied, but was generally positive. The decrease in indicators is largely due to the energizing of economic cooperation with the EU by the two states. The share of their foreign trade in EU coun-

tries is growing rapidly. At the same time, the authorities have repeatedly noted that there are real opportunities that have not been fully capitalized to increase mutual trade between Moldova and Ukraine.

It was planned to reach 1 billion USD, taking into account profits from the energy market, but this could not be achieved. In order to enhance cooperation in this area, it seems important to increase the activity of the Intergovernmental Moldovan-Ukrainian joint commission on trade and economic cooperation. In addition, such areas of cooperation as processing of agricultural products, production of agricultural machinery, implementation of energy-saving technologies for processing and storage of agricultural products remain promising and undeveloped by the two sides.

The energy issue is one of the priorities in bilateral cooperation. The energy factor has repeatedly caused many problems. The most striking examples are the gas conflict between Ukraine and

Table 1: Dynamics of bilateral trade between Republic of Moldova and Ukraine 2009-20181

Year	Exports thousands USD	Imports thousands USD
2009	81 302,60	458 758,80
2010	91 586,90	528 520,30
2011	152 997,90	641 161,60
2012	122 408,40	594 284,40
2013	140 385,70	659 136,80
2014	109 226,80	546 370,00
2015	45 839,30	371 127,90
2016	49 706,45	383 892,41
2017	65 524,03	511 096,14
2018	80 275,94	577 085,77

1 Foreign trade. National Statistics Bureau // <http://www.statistica.md/category.php?l=ro&idc=336>

Russia in 2008-2009, which affected the EU countries, as well as a new round of this conflict after 2014, associated with an increase in gas price for Ukraine, which was actually equal to the basic European cost. As a result, Ukraine refused to import gas from Russia and began to increase its production from its own fields. An ambitious task was set until 2035 - not only to increase gas production for own needs, but also to start exporting it.<sup>12</sup> However, Russian gas, so far, passes in transit through the Ukrainian gas transportation system to the EU countries, and it is imported from there by reverse to Ukraine through Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. A search is underway for ways to increase own gas production.

Moldova's energy dependence is extremely high, which makes the economy extremely vulnerable to any external disruption in energy supply and fluctuations in carrier prices. High dependence on imported gas and electricity, historical debts, outdated systems generating electric and thermal energy are the main catalysts for Moldova's energy issue. Ukraine has been a reliable partner and supplier of electricity for more than twenty years, however, the problem of gas transit through Ukraine in the context of deteriorating Ukrainian-Russian relations is one of the key problems for the Government of Moldova, which requires the search for an optimal solution.

Taking into account the fact that Moldova and Ukraine are full members of the EU Energy Community, the prospects for mutual cooperation in the energy sector

are quite vast. A set of EU directives in the field of gas and electricity supplies are mainly aimed at ensuring the security of energy supplies. Moldova and Ukraine signed in 2018 a Memorandum to synchronize the operation of their energy systems with the European Network of Transmission System Operators (ENTSO-E).<sup>13</sup> As soon as the need to integrate the energy systems of the two states with the pan-European network is becoming increasingly tangible, it is important to accelerate the process of reforming the electricity market and modernizing infrastructure. This will reduce the dependence on the Russian Federation in the energy sector.

Significant help for the economy and infrastructure were the achievements of recent years associated with the development of a number of agreements on international transport and air traffic. Thus, in 2018, a Protocol was signed on amending the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Government of Ukraine of March 20th, 1993, on international road traffic. Due to the fact that the volumes of export and import of goods between the states are increasing, these changes are seen as extremely important, since they allow for the international transportation of goods in a liberalized mode.

The signed Agreement on air traffic between the sides will regulate passenger and freight services between the two countries by air.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, it

12 How to keep warm without Russia: is there enough gas in Western Ukraine // <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-russian-47209883>

13 Ukraine and Moldova will jointly coordinate the integration of energy systems with the EU // [https://elektrovesti.net/60333\\_ukraina-i-moldova-budut-sovmestno-koordinirovat-integratsiyu-energosistem-s-es](https://elektrovesti.net/60333_ukraina-i-moldova-budut-sovmestno-koordinirovat-integratsiyu-energosistem-s-es)

14 Moldova and Ukraine are liberalizing the air and

should be noted that at the moment the Ukrainian airline UIA and the Moldovan airline Air Moldova are monopolists on the air transportation market, the cost of which is economically unreasonably high, which requires the development of measures to protect the national interests of states in the aviation industry.

The most important and sensitive issues which have an old history remain unresolved. These are the completion of the process of demarcation of borders, the recognition of property rights and the settlement of the operating conditions of the Nistru River hydro-hub, which are included in the so-called “package agreements”, the principle of which is as follows: “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”, i.e. provide for the simultaneous signing and exchange of relevant documents.

Considering the Moldovan-Ukrainian relations in the context of European integration policy, it seems important to note the Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation Support Program,<sup>15</sup> by which the EU supports cross-border cooperation between Moldova and Ukraine. This helps to intensify the economic interaction of the cross-border territories, has a beneficial effect on combining the capabilities and resource potential of the two neighboring states, and also helps to attract more entrepreneurs, public organizations and the implementation of infrastructure and logistics projects. Activities of particular importance would be strengthening of the Euroregions “Nistru”, “Upper

Prut”, “Lower Danube” in order to harmonize the development of border areas.

Environmental issues continue to remain relevant. Ukraine has been negotiating with the Moldovan side for ten years the signing of the Agreement on the functioning of the Dniester hydropower plant. However, Moldovan environmentalists consider this agreement to be extremely risky and detrimental to the Nistru river ecosystem. The Government of Ukraine approved in 2016 the Hydropower Development Program until 2026,<sup>16</sup> which envisages the construction of six new hydropower plants in the upper Nistru River, in its plain part. This can lead to an environmental disaster, a shallowing of the Nistru River and an acute shortage of drinking water resources in both states. Nistru River is the main source of drinking water in the Republic of Moldova. Cities like Chisinau, Balti, Rezina, Soroca, Criuleni, Orhei use its drinking resources on a daily basis.

The Republic of Moldova developed in 2017 draft technical rules for the operation of the Nistru River hydro-hub, which are very slowly passing the approval stage. It seems important to establish a mechanism for coordinating the work of the relevant institutions in the field of hydropower and to develop Moldovan-Ukrainian negotiations in the context of preventing an environmental and humanitarian disaster. It is important for the both sides to comply with the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Protection and Sustainable Develop-

16 The hydropower development program for the period of time until 2026. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of July 13th, 2016, No. 552-p Kiev // <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/552-2016-%D1%80#n7>

road transport // <https://gov.md/ru/content/moldova-i-ukraina-liberalizuyut-vozdushnyy-i-avtotransport>

15 Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation (EaPTC) // <http://eaptc.eu/ru/eaptc-program.html>



ment of the Nistru River Basin and make full use of the developed international mechanisms for its protection, as well as prevent stagnation in the process of developing agreements regarding environmental issues.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Therefore, the dilemma of geopolitical choice has become the starting point of the European integration policy of the two states, which has progressively developed over time and has become firmly entrenched in these states' commitment to the European foreign policy. The focus on the completion of the initiated reforms in accordance with European standards will increase the welfare of these states, improve the quality of life of ordinary citizens and implement joint Moldovan-Ukrainian projects, brought together by common European aspirations.

Bilateral friendly and good-neighborly relations between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are united not only by deep historical roots, the unity of European commitment, but also by the presence of broad prospects for deepening mutually beneficial cooperation in the context of European integration policy. The involvement of the European factor in the political dialogue of the states has largely combined their efforts in resolving the Transnistrian conflict and reintegrating the country, maintaining regional security, cross-border cooperation within the framework of EUBAM, as well as combating corruption and smuggling.

## Inordertostrengthen Moldovan-Ukrainian relations and expand the forms and directions of bilateral cooperation, it seems important:

- *Given the changes that have occurred in these states and the rising to power of new power structures, it is important to establish and strengthen political dialogue between the sides at all levels.*
- *It is important for the sides to maintain symmetrical actions and solidarity in maintaining regional and international security.*
- *We should continue to develop cooperation in trade, economic and cultural fields, mastering new directions and opportunities for bilateral cooperation.*
- *It seems important to expand joint dialogue forums and introduce new formats of interaction, more actively involving civil society of the two states to participate in them.*
- *It is necessary to use the European experience to modernize the countries and ensure a prosperous future for citizens by joining efforts and implementing promising new joint projects in the field of developing economic potential, transport strategies, infrastructure and communications. This will enhance the economic development of the states, increase their exports to international markets, including the EU markets, will facilitate their integration into European transport corridors, provide the existing business needs for high-quality transport services, and also increase labor mobility, revitalize the industrial and business activity.*
- *We should also intensively develop joint initiatives towards European integration in the field of energy, technical regulation, development of the digital economy and other areas. Expanding cooperation in the field of science, edu-*

*cation and culture is seen as relevant. In particular, the revitalization of the Moldovan-Ukrainian commission on scientific and technical cooperation, the*

*expansion of joint scientific and technical projects for conducting joint research in the framework of the European framework programs.*

## Republic of Moldova: from stagnation and regress to search for the optimal format of cooperation with the Russian Federation and the CIS

**Natalia Stercul**

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Moldovan-Russian relations have always been viewed through the prism of strategic partnership, despite the actually permanent nature of stagnation and regression of bilateral dialogue, which can be clearly seen in historical retrospective. This was expressed in the repeated use of diplomatic and economic tools to counter each other's policies, distrust of political elites and tension. The combination of the elements of "soft" and "hard" power as integral components of Russia's policy in relation to Moldova continues to exert its influence, its essential and instrumental aspects are not amenable to the counter-acting political technologies used by the Moldovan side.

With the installed of the new Government in 2019, the Republic of Moldova is trying to build a new effective format for bilateral cooperation, taking into account the European foreign policy vector of state development. The main distinguishing feature of this attempt is avoiding a dual policy in the actions of the President and the Government of the Republic of Moldova regarding the Russian Federation

and building relations on the principle - the integration into the EU, cooperation with the Russian Federation and the CIS.

### Peculiarities of the Moldovan-Russian political dialogue

The interest of the two sides in developing relations in the spirit of constructive cooperation based on mutual benefit, expressed by the new political elite, who came to power in the Republic of Moldova in 2009, predetermined an attempt to build a real balance of their pragmatic interests. However, the ratification by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova of the Association Agreement with the EU on July 2nd, 2014, led to deterioration in Moldovan-Russian relations. Russia immediately stepped up its arsenal of political, economic and information tools aimed at the most sensitive areas in relationship between the two states. On the same day, 7 memoranda of inter-agency cooperation were signed between Russia and unrecognized Transnistria<sup>17</sup>. The drawdown of political dialogue predetermined the tension in bilateral interaction.

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Andrei Galbur paid a visit to Moscow in

<sup>17</sup> Russia and Transnistria signed 7 memoranda to develop "Rogozin-Shevchuk" protocol // <https://regnum.ru/news/1821225.html>



April 2016. A breakthrough was expected in relations between Moldova and Russia. The two sides discussed the possibilities of strengthening the Moldovan-Russian cooperation. This was a manifestation of the desire on the part of the Moldovan authorities to resume bilateral cooperation, and on the Russian side - their readiness for review and rapprochement of the positions on key issues of bilateral relations. The attempt to start building a new platform of cooperation between the states had failed.

There was quite a long pause in the political dialogue between the heads of state of the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation, due to the peculiarities of the internal political development of the Republic of Moldova. However, on January 17, 2017, after a nine-year hiatus, relations between the presidents were resumed. The emerging positive dynamics in the political dialogue of the two states was overshadowed by the persona non grata announcement of the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitrii Rogozin and the expulsion of Russian diplomats, initiated by the pro-European Government of Moldova on the basis of information received from the Moldovan secret services. Russia retaliated and announced the expulsion of five Moldovan diplomats. This was a precedent for the deterioration of relations and a demonstration of mutual misunderstanding and political distrust.

In 2018, attempts to strengthen the Moldovan-Russian dialogue were accompanied by the complexity of the internal political situation in the Republic of Moldova, the contradictory statements and actions of the authorities, as well as the foreign

policy pursued by the Russian Federation in the region, traditionally located in the zone of its strategic interests and influence. However, on this background, there were regular visits of the President of the Republic of Moldova to Moscow, meetings of Igor Dodon with Vladimir Putin, with members of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, politicians, statesmen, representatives of large entrepreneurship, business environment and the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church. The intensity of these contacts has reached an unprecedented level. Such a frequency of visits of the President of Moldova to Moscow seems at least strange and cannot but alarm, since this fact indicates an intensification of the Kremlin's influence. In addition, such active actions undertaken by the President to establish a dialogue with Russia were repeatedly criticized by the Government and the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.

The new Government, headed by Maia Sandu, which came to power in 2019, managed to lay the foundations for promoting an honest and open Moldovan-Russian dialogue and move away from the internal confrontational policies of the Government and the President with regard to Russia, while maintaining a firm European foreign policy.

The Russian Federation continues to remain an important partner for the Republic of Moldova. Building a new format of relations between states seems possible if the Moldovan side pursues a clearly formulated policy and open dialogue, where the national interests of the Moldovan state will be taken into account.

This refers to the principle of neutrality, the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Transnistrian region, the disposal of ammunition stored in warehouses in Kolbasno, avoiding the use of economic pressure instruments and other methods widely used by the Russian side to maintain its influence in the region.

The tension of political relations between the two states can be overcome by moving away from controversial discussions and finding a common ground in bilateral cooperation. This can be the key to success and the start of developing an effective platform for dialogue. Building a new partnership format should come from the changing modern realities of the development of states, the regional and international context, as well as from the understanding that Russia is a potentially strong partner that will continue to influence the region.

## Trade and economic cooperation

The basis for the long-term development of trade and economic relations between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation was the Program of Economic Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Government of the Russian Federation for the period of 2009-2020.<sup>18</sup> Between 2009 and 2014 trade and economic relations are steadily developing (see Table 1). A tension of Moldovan-Russian relations was outlined from 2014 to 2017. Russia's opposition as a result of Moldova's rapprochement with the EU

was not limited to diplomatic methods; economic instruments were also widely used, which led to a halving of trade between the two countries (see Table 1). The result was a significant loss by Moldova of its position in the Russian market. The aggravation of relations between Russia and the European Union exacerbated the situation even more.

Realizing the complexity of the situation, the growing dissatisfaction of representatives of the business environment, labor migrants and ordinary citizens in 2016, the Moldovan authorities made a number of efforts to develop a "road map" for restoring trade relations between the countries.<sup>19</sup> This was not an easy task, since Russia repeatedly criticized the Eastern Partnership because of its anti-Russian orientation. In November 2016, the work of the Moldovan-Russian interagency commission on trade and economic cooperation was resumed. The Russian side also resumed dialogue with the Republic of Moldova on migration issue. Since March 1st, 2017, the amnesty was started for labor migrants from Moldova. All this showed the progressive convergence of the positions of the two sides.

There was a development of economic ties in 2018, an increase in the level of trade between countries, an increase in the supply of wine and agricultural products, which had previously repeatedly caused tensions between the states. This component of bilateral relations continues to depend on the consistency of political decisions of the sides, and to act as an

<sup>18</sup> The Protocol of the 14th meeting of the Intergovernmental commission for economic cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation of 26th November 2016 // [http://mec.gov.md/sites/default/files/protokol\\_rm-rf\\_29.11.16.pdf](http://mec.gov.md/sites/default/files/protokol_rm-rf_29.11.16.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Political economy. The basic problems in relations between Moldova and Russia // <http://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/politicheskaya-ekonomika-osnovnye-problemy-v-otnosheniyah-moldovy-i-rossii-26038>

object of manipulation in the process of Moldova's achieving of its own national interests, which do not coincide with the vision and plans of Russia.

The possibilities of revising the entire agenda of the Moldovan-Russian cooperation, including trade and economic cooperation were associated in Russia with the results of the new Parliamentary elections in Moldova in 2019. Such a backlog was made including with Russian efforts. The key figure in this process, Dmitrii Kozak, is the Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for the development of trade and economic relations with Moldova. As a result of the agreements reached between the sides, the Moldovan-Russian intergovernmental commission resumed its work. Within its framework, priority areas of trade cooperation and the resumption of inter-parliamentary cooperation as an important platform for bilateral dialogue were considered. The tendency to reset relations was reinforced by the II Moldovan-Russian Economic Forum, held in Chisinau.

The issue of Moldova's dependence on Russian energy supplies remains a problem. Gazprom PJSC continues to cover the natural gas needs of the Republic of Moldova. The issue of payments to the Russian suppliers was raised repeatedly in the period 2009-2019, which is not carried out entirely and in violation of the contract terms. The issue of Russia's pricing policy in this area and the Transnistrian debt to Gazprom due to its failure to fulfill its obligations to pay for the consumed gas remains extremely sensitive for Moldova. From the Moldovan

point of view, its debts to Gazprom are a matter of international gas policy, which Russia is trying to use to put pressure on the Republic of Moldova. In this context, the sides should continue consultations on the comprehensive resolution of problematic issues of cooperation in the energy sector in general and the gas sector in particular.

The new format of cooperation with Russia involves the intensification of trade and economic cooperation, expansion of sales of Moldovan products to the Russian market and attraction of investments to the country. For this aim, it is important to move away from the politicization of trade and economic cooperation between the countries, to build relations on the basis of mutually beneficial economic and trade interests, as well as to solve the existing problems in this area, many of which were created artificially. The multi-vector format of Moldova's foreign policy, built in the new conditions of historical development, consists in continuing the policy of European integration with simultaneous cooperation with the Russian Federation and the CIS.

## **Relations between the Republic of Moldova and the CIS**

The CIS is a regional interstate organization recognized by the international community and based on the cooperation of independent states, the activity of which is aimed at strengthening the stability and sustainable economic development of the participating states. In 2009, the work began within the CIS on a draft new document on the Free Trade Zone with the aim of updating the concept of

further development of this organization and a draft strategy for its economic development for the period of time until 2030. The new document was signed on October 18, 2011 by the governments of the member states, including the Republic of Moldova.

In the context of European integration, the issue of Moldova's membership in the CIS has repeatedly become the subject of political speculation. The signing of the Moldova's Association Agreement with the EU did not imply a withdrawal from the CIS. However, representatives of the liberal wing (in March 2014 and in January 2018) took the initiative twice to denounce the Agreement on the creation of the CIS. Despite the fact that the Moldovan authorities did not support such a radical initiative of radical politicians, Moldova's participation in 2017 in the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS was blocked. In addition, the Republic of Moldova refused to chair the CIS in 2017, making ref-

erence to financial difficulties. The Moldovan authorities are trying in 2019 to revive cooperation with the CIS, being guided by the importance for Moldova of a free trade zone within this format.

Despite the decline in exports of Moldovan goods to the CIS countries due to their reorientation to the EU market, the CIS continues to be a significant market for the sale of Moldovan products. The CIS countries represent about 35% of the foreign trade of the Republic of Moldova (see Table 1). The organization contributes to the development of the economy, the free movement of citizens, the access of Moldovan products to foreign markets and does not impose any restrictions on the domestic and foreign policy areas. After President Igor Dodon came to power, the need for CIS membership for Moldova was supported by the importance of a free trade regime that provides Moldovan economic agents with access to the markets of the participating countries.

Table 1: Dynamics of trade turnover between the RM-RF and the RM-CIS 2009-2018<sup>1</sup>

Year	The total export from RM to CIS countries (thousands USD)	The total import from CIS countries (thousands USD)	Exports from RM to the RF (thousands USD)	Imports to RM from the RF (thousands USD)
2009	490 415,2	1 141 782,6	286 491,6	374 512,8
2010	624 003,2	1 256 851,6	403 978,4	586 477,3
2011	919 265,0	1 713 415,9	625 509,4	822 961,0
2012	928 119,5	1 623 721,2	655 132,0	816 882,1
2013	923 219, 8	1 672 307,7	631 931,5	788 040,5
2014	735 647,7	1 449 245,9	423 717,5	717 220,6
2015	492 294,6	1 018 110,7	240 648,6	535 691,1
2016	414 185,25	1 027 442,11	233 177,4	535 201,08
2017	462 820,45	1 206 051,90	254 534,82	571 704,23
2018	415 922,25	1 449 078,77	218 571,10	720 656,63

<sup>1</sup> Foreign trade. National Statistics Bureau // <http://www.statistica.md/category.php?l=ro&idc=336>

The change in the domestic political situation in the country and the coming to power of the new Government, headed by Maia Sandu, marked in 2019 a new stage in the reloading of relations between the RM-CIS. Moldova seeks to increase export performance not only to the Russian Federation, which remains the main trading partner within the CIS, but also to other member states of this structure.

Participation in this organization facilitates regional trade by improving trade relations between states and maintaining zero customs duty for more than 10 thousand groups of goods. In addition, a mechanism has been provided for the settlement of trade disputes within the WTO. The main distinguishing feature of the current system that has developed in the CIS over 20 years of its existence is the transition from bilateral agreements to multilateral agreements, which has led to a significant reduction in many bilateral procedures.

At a meeting of the CIS Mixed Commission in 2019, in which the Republic of Moldova took part, the concept of further development of the CIS was updated. The draft CIS economic development strategy for the period of time until 2030 was reformatted into a draft Declaration on Strategic Economic Cooperation of the CIS Member States,<sup>20</sup> which will create an effective partnership mechanism aimed at improving the development of economic relations, both within the CIS and in cooperation with other organizations. This will increase the competitiveness of the participating states, will ensure the

further development of mutual trade, as well as the development and implementation of investment projects.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The Moldovan-Russian dialogue, often seen as a strategic dialogue for the period 2009–2019 reflected virtually the entire palette of tension, revealing the acute problems of bilateral relations. The key sources of difficulties are:

- *inertia in Russian politics, presupposing the preservation of Russia's traditional influence on the Republic of Moldova;*
- *the influence of narrow interests, expressed in the promotion by individual politicians of their own goals, which are contrary to the national interests of the Republic of Moldova;*
- *the problem of mutual perception, requiring a reduction in the degree of public rhetoric, which will not provoke a counterproductive reaction of the political elites of these states.*

The new format of cooperation being built between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation and the CIS opens up opportunities for improving mutual understanding and resolving existing contentious issues between the two states.

### In order to build the optimal format of cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation:

- *A pragmatic political dialogue should be continued at all levels of state power, guided by the clarity and precision of the tasks' wording.*

<sup>20</sup> Declaration on Strategic Economic Cooperation of the CIS Member States // <http://www.newscentralasia.net/2019/10/14/declaration-on-economic-cooperation-cis-ru/>

- *It seems necessary to reconsider the problem areas related to the rapprochement of positions on the fundamental issues of bilateral Moldovan-Russian cooperation. Care should be taken to build the foundations for an honest and open dialogue based on the political trust of the parties, which will lay the foundations for successful long-term co-operation.*
- *It is important to focus on common pragmatic economic interests. The new format of trade and economic cooperation should be built on the basis of the prevailing reality - the European aspirations of the Republic of Moldova and the mutually beneficial bilateral Moldovan-Russian cooperation.*
- *Concentrate efforts on developing a plan of measures to reduce Russia's influence, in the event of a policy of pressure on its part in the process of establishing a new format of cooperation.*
- *Search for compromise solutions taking into account the national interests of the Republic of Moldova.*

In the light of building an optimal format for cooperation with the CIS, it seems important for the Republic of Moldova:

- *Conducting an effective trade policy with the CIS countries, contributing to its economic development and increase in trade.*
- *Assessment of existing regulatory and procedural measures in the field of trade with the CIS countries.*
- *Overcoming the negative trade balance with the CIS countries, fully realizing the potential of the market for goods in the CIS.*
- *Avoiding of politicizing the issue of trade and economic cooperation with the CIS countries.*
- *Establishment of relations with the CIS countries on the basis of mutually beneficial interests with a view to their stable development, which will contribute to the promotion of joint business projects and the creation of a favorable business climate.*



# Moldova's relations with Poland and the Visegrád Group

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## The relevance of Poland and the role of the Visegrád Group

The countries of Central Europe - best represented collectively through the sub-regional platform of Visegrad 4 (V4) - are among the most active political supporters for Moldova, especially from the point of view of the association policies with the European Union. V4 becomes relevant for Moldova only after the group consolidates itself as a relatively formal platform but also individually as EU member states, somewhere towards the beginning of the last decade. At the same time, in the 2009-2014 period of time, the eastern region of the EU's external border raise in the rank of priorities.

The new member states of the V4 countries have found an important niche of foreign policies and a new projection for their own development within the EU by specializing in the relationship with the Eastern Neighborhood. The main advantage of these states in relations with Moldova becomes the expertise of the transformation through Europeanization (the adoption of the European acquis) and the capacity to corroborate the requests (even theoretical) of association (and potentially integration) of Moldova in Brussels.

In 2012, V4 launches its own program for Eastern Partnership countries (V4EaP). Moldova becomes in this period the third cumulative recipient of V4 development assistance (after Ukraine and Belarus<sup>21</sup>), benefiting from bilateral channel projects - the most eloquent example being the Polish Agency for Development (Polish Aid) and Solidarity Fund PL in Moldova or the bilateral cooperation program in the field of Official Foreign Aid between the Czech Republic and Moldova 2011-1722, and Slovak Aid whose presence in Moldova has gradually increased since 2013.

At the same time V4 offers development projects also through the multilateral format of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) with an initial annual budget of 1.46 million Euro, dedicated to the EP countries. However, as we approach the present days, only 13% of the IVF budget is dedicated to the EP countries, which reflects a certain fatigue with the EP project as a whole from the V4 perspective. For example, the Czech Republic intends that only in 2022, when Prague will hold the Presidency of the Council, the EaP will undergo a deep review (obviously, at the proposal of the Czech Republic) including in the V4 format.<sup>23</sup>

21 Balázs Gyimesi, The Visegrad Group's development assistance to Eastern Partnership countries, 02.10.2016. For more details see <http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/node/1953>. It is very difficult to calculate the exact cumulative amount of annual resources spent by the four governments together, because not all governments have similar ODA (Official Development Aid) tools, and publicly presented data is sometimes missing or not centralized. Also, the interest of each V4 country are prioritised differently. The most generous countries in V4 according to the amounts spent from 2009 to date remain the Czech Republic (being the main donor for Moldova in V4 until 2012) and Poland, whose assistance has increased since 2012, rising annually to the cumulative amount (Through V4EaP, formed bilaterally and multilaterally) of about 1.5 million Euro.

22 Zsuzsanna Végh, Visegrad Development Aid in the Eastern Partnership Region, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich / Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, February 2014, p.10

23 Discussion with a high level Czech dip-

Currently the V4EaP priorities are oriented towards civil society and the support of cooperation between local administrations, universities and citizens.<sup>24</sup> Projects under the IVF umbrella, however, are far from crossing the threshold of small and medium-sized projects (occasionally) with a strategic projection in scope and impact <sup>25</sup>.

As we approach 2019, the largest donor in V4, including for Moldova, has naturally become Poland, both because of its clearly greater potential than of the other members of the Group, and because of the fact that relevant and comprehensive policies vis-à-vis Moldova from Central Europe mostly originated (2008) in Warsaw (and Stockholm), the other capitals having a sometimes substitute and functionally minor role in terms of the V4-Plus format in which one of the political vectors was directed to the Eastern Partnership states. V4 at that time (2011-2013) became an important source of lobbying in Brussels for the Eastern Partnership countries, including for Moldova, but V4 as a whole could never represent more than additional political and diplomatic support.

On this background, for the first time in the history of bilateral relations, Poland becomes an official development aid donor for Moldova with an impact compa-

table 26 to other donors such as the USA, Sweden or Romania. By the horizon of 2009-2010 Poland's interest in Moldova was rather marginal, except for the offer of a loan of 15 million Euros (offered in 2007) which, in the end, was not contracted due to the inability to co-finance the proposed projects in infrastructure.<sup>27</sup> The first visit of a highest rank Polish dignitary to Moldova is carried out only in March 2011, that is two decades after the declaration of independence <sup>28</sup>.

The success of the first years of negotiation of the Association Agreement encourages the Polish government to grant an ambitious loan of 100 million Euro (0.1% interest over a 12-year term) for the development of Moldova towards the end of 2013. This is the turning point in the Moldovan-Polish relations, a fact observed also by the intensity of the visits exchanges at the highest level (prime ministers and foreign ministers), nevertheless, in the next years (2015-2017) it becomes obvious that Chisinau is no longer able to rise to the level of Warsaw's expectations.

At that time, the generosity of Poland was exceeded only by Romania's grant of similar value, which would later be absorbed relatively more successfully in Chisinau,

lomat, Warsaw, October 2nd 2019.

<sup>24</sup> An example of types of projects implemented through V4EaP can be consulted here: <https://www.ms.gov.pl/resourcel/6b5b2840-b672-484e-a04a-687a5b4f3c3e?JCR%2%A0>

<sup>25</sup> It is also symptomatic that the 20-25 projects carried out annually by the Solidarity Fund PL do not exceed the financial threshold of 10,000 Euro per project. Their importance at local level cannot be doubted, with Solidarity Fund PL being a crucial support for many local communities, but the scale of the projects is far from causing a paradigm shift from chronic underdevelopment to sustainable development close to European standards. For more details see: <http://solidarityfund.md/istorii-de-succes/>

<sup>26</sup> Between 2004-2008, when Poland becomes ODA donor (official development aid) the official development aid offered by Poland varied in mln Euros from 0.1 to 0.66. M. Kosienkowski, "Poland: Rediscovering Moldova", p. 147, in Marcin Kosienkowski and William Schreiber, *Moldova Arena of International Influence*, Lexington Books 2012

<sup>27</sup> M. Kosienkowski, "Poland: Rediscovering Moldova", p. 147, in Marcin Kosienkowski and William Schreiber, *Moldova Arena of International Influence*, Lexington Books 2012

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed overview of the Polish-Moldovan bilateral relations in the first two decades of independence of Moldova see Marcin Kosienkowski "Poland: Rediscovering Moldova", pp.143-158, in Marcin Kosienkowski and William Schreiber, *Moldova Arena of International Influence*, Lexington Books 2012



including due to the fact that for Bucharest Moldova remains perhaps the only coherent foreign policy destination as EU member state generating relevant policies for Moldova, while Poland focused its efforts on Ukraine, passing Moldova to a secondary register.

## The Polish foreign policy in the East

The potential of the Eastern Partnership has been a reflection and consequence of Poland's consolidation as an EU state, also known as the "champion of Eastern Europe", due to its exceptional development over the last three decades. In this context, a special role has been played by Warsaw's foreign policy identity, for which Eastern Europe - mainly Ukraine - has been a strategic priority for the last two decades.

Thus, as long as Ukraine was at the top of Poland's Eastern agenda, Moldova could not be absent from the East European basket of policies, at the same time, Moldova always had to be aware that it cannot be decoupled from Ukraine in the relationship with Warsaw, not least because of the pivotal character of Ukraine for the whole Euro-Atlantic security architecture. This reality was felt even more evidently after the coming to power in Poland of the Law and Justice party, which showed a more passive and selective interest in the Eastern space.

As Poland continued to be a consistent promoter of the Eastern Partnership, the chances of the Partnership for success were relatively higher. At the same

time, the success of Poland in Moldova depended to a great extent on the latter's ability to absorb and especially to effectively implement the political messages and concrete trans-regional or bilateral policies of Poland.

Over the 2010-2011 years, Chisinau started the right way this path of Europeanization of the state, becoming in turn for a few years, somewhat unexpected, the model student of the EP (2011-2013). During this period, Poland develops an increased interest for Moldova. However, as Moldova was subjected to oligarchic capture, interest in Moldova decreased, so that by the end of 2016 Moldova is no longer an important topic in Warsaw. This coldness has lasted practically until now, or at least until the anti-oligarchic change in June 2019, the new chapter of bilateral relations waiting to be written in the nearest possible future.

At the same time, Poland's policy towards Moldova has reflected since 2016 the changes in Warsaw's domestic and foreign policy, with the rise of the governments led by the Law and Justice Party. Visits of Polish dignitaries, but also of Moldovan ones, becoming more formalistic political exercises of consultation and public image. However, until the moment of political change in Poland in 2015, in the light of Poland's eastern policy as a whole, the last decade can be differentiated by two major directions. The first one, 2010-2015, the policy of dynamic and pragmatic development with the Eastern Partnership states with the aim of Europeanizing them and transforming them into viable, consolidated states, capable of resisting the policies of division fed

by Russia; and, the second one, 2016 - to present, a selective reactive-active policy on the background of Poland's ambitious internal development projects and rhetoric following the vague model of illiberal democracy.

The foreign policy of Poland in the 2016 – to present period loses visibly from its open character, often dedicated to intensive relations with Eastern Europe. Poland becomes more self-centered, and Eastern Europe ranks second on the list of priorities. Poland is gradually ceasing to be the driving force within the EU vis-à-vis the Eastern Partnership.

Therefore, the change of the identity rhetoric towards Ukraine (as a by-product of the illiberalism promoted by the Law and Justice Party (PLJ) reflected also in foreign policy) and the strange occasional straining of the relationship with Kyiv on the identity-historical aspect had a tangential consequence for the interest towards Moldova, which in turn has de facto changed the paradigm of developing bilateral relations, discouraging new initiatives not only from Poland, but also weakening the EU's focus on Moldova as a whole (where Poland had until recently been one of those more consistent promoters of the Eastern Partnership in Brussels). The strained relationship of Poland with Brussels on the rule of law and justice had the same effect. The soft isolation of Warsaw that followed as a result of PLJ illiberalism had consequences, thus, on the normative discourse of Poland on the Eastern partners. If Ukraine dropped down in the list of Warsaw's priorities after 2016, then Moldova was placed broadly speaking in a second league.

## The Romanian “Nexus” in Poland's relationship with Moldova

Few people would like to make this aspect public, but the relationship of Moldova with Poland (at the level of strategic perception) depends in an unattributed way on the dynamics of the strategic partnership between Poland and Romania. The partnership between the two NATO and EU states can contribute to or discourage the Moldovan-Polish bilateral dynamics through the strategic prioritization of Romania by Poland to the detriment of Moldova.

In other words, if Romania explicitly or implicitly requests a *droit de regard* within the EU vis-à-vis Moldova, this request is transitional also on Poland, perhaps not in multilateral formats (Association Council for example), but in bilateral ones. An example of this is represented by diplomatic consultations between Bucharest and Warsaw, during which Bucharest requested that any political consultations with Chisinau be in line with Bucharest interests or perceptions<sup>29</sup>.

The most eloquent example in this case is the Eastern Partnership, which at a certain period of its existence was perceived in Bucharest as a project that competed with Romania's strategy in the Black Sea region (2010-2014) or the assertion of the “next foreign policy strategy of Romania after the Euro-Atlantic integration”, that is, in other words, the unification of Romania with Moldova and implicitly “the burning of the stages” in the European

<sup>29</sup> A series of discussions with Polish diplomats during the 2013-15 period of time.

path of Moldova.<sup>30</sup> These perceptions changed with the rise of Klaus Iohannis, but at the diplomatic level in Warsaw the perception was valid: “let’s not irritate Bucharest by showing too much love for Chisinau”, that is a realistic and somehow legitimate reflection of strategic priorities of Poland, but which do not necessarily serve the interest of Moldova.

The prioritization of Bucharest “at the expense of Chisinau” came also on the background of the security dynamics in the region after the annexation of Crimea, the undeclared Russian-Ukrainian war and the militarization of the Black Sea. The partnership agenda of the two major Eastern Flank countries is dominated by security and defense issues (at the bilateral level and based on the NATO Eastern flank), but also by new critical infrastructure development projects such as the Three Seas Initiative. In this context, any potential large-scale Polish initiative will make sure that it does not contradict Romania’s interests in Moldova.

Therefore, during the transformation of Bucharest into Plahotniuc regime’s advocate in 2016-2019, Warsaw no longer had a choice other than adopting a policy of expectation and inertia. This perception has been exacerbated in recent years by Chisinau’s lack of interest in developing a bilateral partnership with Poland. Finally, Moldova has never tried to get out of the paradigm of the mental map dependence dominated by the two direct geographical neighbors (Romania and Ukraine) or the mental dependence on the former im-

perial metropolis (Moscow, in the case of left parties or the presidency under Igor Dodon).

Poland understood this mental-identity complex of Chisinau and since 2016 has made no efforts to extract Moldova from this gray area, the responsibility turning to Romania as much as possible, while there were sufficient suspicions that Romania’s agenda on Moldova was also captured by the oligarchic interests of V. Plahotniuc and the Democratic Party.

## **The current state of the relationship between Moldova and Poland**

Moldovan-Polish relations are still far from being capitalized to their full potential. Perhaps the best example in this regard is the way in which the Polish loan of 100 million Euros was managed at an interest rate of 0.1% for 12 years, a loan granted to Moldova in 2013, of which no penny has been spent so far. The deadlock and the inability of the Moldovan governments (starting with the Iurie Leanca cabinet and ending with Pavel Filip) to absorb this credit have arisen as a result of corruption in the Moldovan banking system and differences in perceptions regarding the financial and banking institutional standards and procedures of Poland.

Chisinau’s refusal to adjust its bureaucratic-banking system responsible for credit absorption to Poland’s demands further fuelled the disinterest in Chisinau. At the beginning of 2017 (at the initiative of the Moldovan Ministry of Finance) the Filip government decided to dismantle

30 See the multiple statements of the then President Traian Basescu before the Vilnius Summit in November 2013, as well as similar statements made since 2009, after winning the second term at Cotroceni.

the unit for the implementation of the agreement for the Polish credit. This measure was contrary to the logic of previous contractual commitments between Polish and Moldovan companies and banks. Thus, no penny has been invested so far to the interest of Moldova, because there was no will and capacity in Chisinau to understand the financial and regulatory requirements of Poland.

The bilateral relationship between 2015-2019 (until June) remained captive to the malfunctioning of the Moldovan governments during the mandate of which this potential source of very cheap credit could contribute to projects of strategic importance for Moldova (in the field of agriculture, in particular, or, for example, for the construction of a modern wastewater treatment plant in Chisinau, as mentioned during the government meeting on September 4, 2019<sup>31</sup>). This potential can still be recovered at present, but a political and human resources incentive from the Maia Sandu cabinet is needed<sup>32</sup>, as well as an improvement at central (bureaucratic and diplomatic) level of knowledge about the banking standards of the Polish State.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Since its independence Moldova has never prioritized relations with the Visegrad Group countries. In the mentality of the political elites from Chisinau, relations with these states were at best second-

ary. The relationship with Warsaw was to a certain extent more intense between 2011-2015, but even in the latter case, Chisinau did not know how to establish a sustained bilateral partnership, capable of speculating Warsaw's privileged status in Central and Eastern Europe, as an additional source of maximizing the development opportunities offered by Poland at a certain time (see the still unused loan of 100 million Euros or another agricultural loan of 15 million offered in 2007, this one not accessed also due to the carelessness and probably incompetence of the governments of that period).

Poland is one of the most important sources of expertise on and for Moldova in Visegrad 4 and the EU as a whole, as well as a potential source of modernization that Chisinau has not yet harnessed (with a political and economic potential at least comparable to that of Romania). The year 2020 may become the year of the reactivation of a strategic relationship the ascendant of which was interrupted in 2015-2016, a reality that still dominates out of inertia. Therefore, it is necessary to reinvigorate the political dialogue between the two capitals. A visit of the Moldovan prime minister is still expected, which is more than five months after the Maia Sandu's government investment.

At the time of writing this text, it has been five months since Moldova was released from the Plahotniuc regime, a regime that had at least a negative influence on relations with Poland and V4 by extension. Chisinau is trying to return to the status of "the best student of the Eastern Partnership class", but this time it no longer has the same protective couch in Poland. In

31 For more details see (min. 44-48) <https://www.privesc.eu/Arhiva/88299/Sedinta-Guvernului-Republicii-Moldova-din-4-septembrie-2019>

32 These incentives are needed even at the level of the diplomatic corps posted to Poland, where the Embassy of Moldova operates with only 5 diplomats and a breakdown budget.

other words, the interest of Poland, as well as of the other V4 states, has acquired accents of fatigue and even hidden rejection if we consider the strained relationship between Kyiv and Budapest, or the latter's shifting its focus in relations with the Balkan states or close relations with Russia. 10 years after the Eastern Partnership was launched in Prague in 2009, we are in EaP's review process, a process that will last at least 2-3 more years.

Starting with November 2019, a V4 Member State - Hungary - will have the portfolio of the EU Commissioner for Neighborhood Relations. In light of the strained relations between Kyiv and Budapest in recent years, this is not necessarily a good sign for Moldova, which is why Chisinau should invest more resources to improve its relationship with Warsaw if it wants to attract new opportunities. A new improvement would be represented by the increase in the number of diplomatic corps and budget of the Moldovan embassy in Warsaw and a fostering of a more intensive political and economic dialogue. Creation of sectorial working groups, with a diverse composition and concrete agenda, including civil society or think tank experts could be a way to get out of the passive area of diplomacy with "minimum human and financial resources".

Poland enjoys the existence of a quite large group of specialized experts on

Moldova. Starting with the current Polish ambassador Bartłomiej Zdaniuk, this group (around 20 experts) includes not only experts in foreign policy and security, but also experts in development or local administration and infrastructure, who have accumulated over a decade the knowledge relevant on and for Moldova. The existence of this group of enthusiasts could represent a new beginning (based on an organizational platform) of a formalized and sustained dialogue for the faster and really deeper development of bilateral relations. Many of these experts are found in think tanks, NGOs, universities and European structures of regional development.

A major theme for the beginning of a forum for debates and design of concrete policies would be to set the Moldovan profile institutions according to Poland's requirements for lending in agriculture, environmental infrastructure, SMEs and the security of banking services. Here the Polish loan of 100 mln Euros would be back on the table of discussions. Poland would be ready to provide expertise and funding for these sectors, but it needs an interested and competent interlocutor in Chisinau. It is high time for Chisinau to expand its strategic partnership formats and such a partnership with Poland would be a logical continuation of Moldova's road to Europeanization.

# The bilateral relations of the Republic of Moldova with the USA. Multilateral cooperation within the UN, GUAM, the Council of Europe in 2009-2019: Hopes and Disillusionment on the Background of Excessive Politicization

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## The bilateral relations of the Republic of Moldova with the USA

It is a well-known fact that a state's foreign policy is a reflection and continuity of its internal policy. The Republic of Moldova is a young state with profound congenital malformations. In addition to the geographical location and historical determinism, the country is facing problems of identity, reduced social cohesion, declining human capacity, weak economic potential and non-functioning institutions, which only extract political rent from the public but, also, from the private systems.

The dysfunctionality of the state cannot fail to affect its foreign policy, which often became an extension of party politics and the personal interests of those who run the ruling party at one time or another. This phenomenon certainly is damaging to diplomacy and the promotion of the national interests of the Republic of Moldova. The most striking example in this regard was probably the appointment by Vladimir Plahotniuc, in June 2018, of his former secretary Cristina Balan as

Ambassador to Washington D.C. Just as curious was President Dodon's tacit acceptance of this nomination, which is at least questionable for such a serious position.<sup>33</sup> Especially that the former Ambassador Aureliu Ciocoi (career diplomat with large experience) had been recalled in suspicious circumstances just months after his appointment. Former ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to the USA, Igor Munteanu, described as regrettable the fact that the Republic of Moldova does not have an ambassador "in the most important nation in the world".<sup>34</sup> We can only state with the same regret that even today, half a year after the recall of Cristina Balan, our country does not have an Ambassador to Washington D.C.

There is no doubt that the last ten years have been marked both by successes and failures in the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova, both bilaterally and multilaterally. Nevertheless, the Republic of Moldova was visited by US Vice President Joseph Biden in March 2011,<sup>35</sup> German Chancellor Angela Merkel in August

33 Why doesn't the Republic of Moldova have an ambassador to the United States? A "discreet" decree. Dodon approved the appointment of the new ambassador to Washington D.C.

<https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/dodon-a-semnat-decretul-de-numire-a-cristinei-balan-ambasadoare-la-washington-/29273419.html>

34 <https://www.zdg.md/editia-print/politic/de-ce-re-moldova-nu-are-ambasador-in-statele-unite-ale-americii>

35 US Vice President, Joseph Biden, comes to Chișinău. [https://www.publika.md/vicepresedintele-sua-joseph-biden-vine-la-chisinau\\_252561.html](https://www.publika.md/vicepresedintele-sua-joseph-biden-vine-la-chisinau_252561.html)



2012,<sup>36</sup> which shows a successful Moldovan diplomacy and a high level of bilateral relations. However, in recent years there has been increasing isolation on the background of a country image that has become increasingly wrinkled by controversial decisions in the country's domestic policy. External partnerships have undergone a sinusoidal evolution. In this regard, bilateral relations with the United States of America were no exception.

Over the years, political and economic relations have become closer, but our region has not been a priority for Washington's foreign policy in the last decade. However, the biggest achievement came in 2010, when the "Millennium Challenge Corporation" agreement was signed, with a value of 262 million USD over a 5-year term. After the Republic of Moldova signed the Association Agreement with the European Union and the DCFTA in 2014, the United States expressed active support for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova.

The American state of North Carolina has a special place in the RM-US relations. This state has been a "sister state" with the Republic of Moldova since 1999 under the NATO Partnership for Peace Program. This partnership has developed actively in the last ten years. The Memorandum of Principles and Procedures between the Republic of Moldova and the State of North Carolina concerning their desire to strengthen their good relations was signed last time on September 30, 2015, by Pat McCrory, Governor of North Carolina, in Raleigh, North Carolina. On

October 9th, 2015, the Memorandum of Understanding was signed in Chisinau, by Elaine F. Marshall, Secretary of State of North Carolina, and Andrei Galbur, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration; as well as by Valeriu Strelet, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova. This document has a duration of five years. Due to this partnership, the Republic of Moldova has increased its capabilities in fields such as civil emergency operations, the expansion of the markets for its products, has benefited from cultural, scientific and academic exchanges and has received humanitarian aid from several governmental and non-governmental organizations, including in the field of public health and safety.<sup>37</sup>

Following the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 and the conflict in Donbas, our region, including Transnistrian region, has become a hot topic on the US regional agenda. This process was cleverly exploited by the Chisinau government, which capitalized on the worsening of the geopolitical situation in the region to strengthen its pro-Western political position at the expense of clear undemocratic backsliding in domestic politics. However, the launch of the strategic dialogue RM-USA in March 2014 is a success with many positive long-term implications both in the field of political, economic relations and in the aspect of ensuring regional security and stability.

The Moldovan-American defense cooperation is based on the Memorandum regarding the cooperation in the military

36 Angela Merkel, visits Chişinău. <https://www.dw.com/ro/angela-merkel-%C3%AEn-vizi%C4%83-la-chi%C5%9Fin%C4%83u/a-16183692>

37 Moldova Partnership. [https://www.sos-nc.gov/divisions/moldova\\_partnership](https://www.sos-nc.gov/divisions/moldova_partnership)



area between the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Moldova and the Department of Defense of the United States of America, signed on December 4th, 1995. This cooperation has continued for the last ten years. The National Army has repeatedly received assistance in the past decade. The equipment provided in 2011 to the National Army consisted of over 80 technical units.<sup>38</sup> 43 American combat vehicles were donated in 2014 to the 22nd Peacekeeping Battalion. The donation was made by the United States for the cooperation and participation of the Moldovan military contingents in various missions abroad.<sup>39</sup> The National Army received in 2017 a new donation of military equipment from the Government of the United States of America. The lot consisted of 41 HMMWV (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle) units and trucks.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, the strengthening of bilateral relations between the Republic of Moldova and the United States of America continued through projects and initiatives to support the Republic of Moldova, such as the launch by Republican Congressman Pete Olson and Democrat David Price on July 13, 2017, of the “Congressional Moldova Caucus” - Support group for the Republic of Moldova from the US House of Representatives, within the 115th legislature of the US Congress.

38 The US donates a batch of technical equipment to the National Army. <https://www.army.md/?lng=2&action=show&cat=122&obj=672>

39 The National Army received a batch of military equipment from the US: “We will bring other equipment too”. [https://www.realitatea.md/armata-nationala-a-primit-un-lot-de-tehnica-militara-din-partea-sua-vom-duce-i-alt-echipament-foto\\_11710.html](https://www.realitatea.md/armata-nationala-a-primit-un-lot-de-tehnica-militara-din-partea-sua-vom-duce-i-alt-echipament-foto_11710.html)

40 The National Army received a donation of American military equipment. <https://agora.md/stiri/28232/video--armata-nationala-a-primit-donatie-de-tehnica-militara-americana>

This platform aims to establish a dialogue on the importance of Moldova-US relations, the role of the Republic of Moldova in European security and energy security in Eastern Europe.

In turn, the Moldovan Parliament of the twentieth legislature has set up a parliamentary platform - the Joint Commission for Strategic Dialogue “ProAmerica” to strengthen parliamentary diplomacy and enhance inter-parliamentary cooperation, as well as to strengthen strategic cooperation between states, including by increasing US investments in the Republic of Moldova. Currently, the Friendship Group with the United States of America is active within the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, created on July 05th, 2019. The group includes 39 members, the Chairman being Mihail Popșoi, the Parliamentary Faction “The Action and Solidarity Party, the ACUM Block”.

The United States grants diplomatic and financial support to the Republic of Moldova, but sets out certain criteria and conditions such as: fighting corruption at all levels, promoting economic reforms and ensuring free competition in different fields. Currently the United States of America continues to support the Republic of Moldova, after having played an important role in resolving the political and constitutional crisis that the Republic of Moldova went through in June 2019. The US remains an indispensable partner for the Republic of Moldova and the quality of bilateral relations and the support provided will largely determine the success of Chisinau in implementing its reform agenda.

Although the repeal of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Republic of Moldova in 2012 eliminated the existing trade restrictions in the Moldovan-US bilateral cooperation and created the necessary premises for the exploitation of the permanent normal trade regime in economic relations, this opportunity remains unused. Economic cooperation of the USA and the Republic of Moldova is relatively modest. There are approximately 382 companies with US capital in Moldova and the invested capital is 31.4 million USD (2018). The United States ranks 6th among the top foreign investors. The volume of foreign trade of the Republic of Moldova with the United States of America in 2018 registered an amount of about 98 million USD.

According to the value of the volume of trade, the USA ranks 18th among the partner countries with which the Republic of Moldova has commercial relations, with a share of only 1.15%. Exports from Moldova totaled 21 million USD, while goods imported from the United States totaled 76 million USD. Although there has been a significant increase in trade in recent years, the above statistics indicate the huge potential that is missed in bilateral trade.<sup>41</sup> The main cause of this failure is the high level of corruption and the lack of an independent justice system, which keeps many potential investors away.

## The multilateral cooperation of the Republic of Moldova within the United Nations

The United Nations, based on the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, contributes to maintaining international peace and security, promoting human well-being and rights, including in the Republic of Moldova. The Republic of Moldova became a UN member on March 2nd, 1992, once the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/46/223. As a universal forum for debating global issues, the Republic of Moldova attaches particular importance to the UN's role in promoting democracy and human rights, maintaining international peace and security, economic and social development, respecting the principles of international law and the rule of law.

The cooperation of the Republic of Moldova with the UN and its specialized institutions represents an important field in the country's activity. Currently, the UN activity in Moldova is carried out in accordance with the UN - Republic of Moldova Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development (CPDD) 2018–2022. The CPDD 2018–2022 and subsequent UN strategic documents for the development of the Republic of Moldova should be viewed as 5-year action plans designed to contribute to achieving the 2030 Vision approved by the Government of the Republic of Moldova. The CPDD supports Moldova's development efforts and its ambitions for European integration in four priority areas:

41 Trade and economic relations: USA-Repub-

lic of Moldova <https://sua.mfa.gov.md/ro/content/rela%C5%A3ii-comercial-economice>

1. Governance, human rights and gender equality
2. Sustainable, inclusive and fair economic growth
3. Sustainability and resilience of the environment
4. Inclusive and equitable social development

Currently, over 20 specialized agencies, UN funds and programs have offices in Chisinau, or project offices, as follows: UN Development Program (UNDP); UN Children's Fund (UNICEF); World Health Organization (WHO); International Labor Organization (ILO); United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); etc.

In the context of RM-UN cooperation, on June 10-12, 2017, RM was visited by the UN Deputy Secretary General, UN Women Executive Director, Mrs. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, this being one of the highest level visits of a UN official in recent years. During the visit, the UN official held a series of meetings with the top leadership of the Republic of Moldova, during which the progress made by our country with regard to gender equality and women's rights, as well as further reforms in this area, were discussed.

Another aspect that will contribute to the efficiency of the RM-UN communication is drafting new Country Programs of the specialized UN agencies resident in the Republic of Moldova, such as UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP. These Country Programs, planned for the years 2018-2022, are harmo-

nized with the new Assistance Framework, the Republic of Moldova-EU Association Agreement and other documents in progress, which will ensure the coherence of these documents and will bring a considerable contribution to the implementation of the reforms agenda of the Government of the Republic of Moldova.

Similarly, the Republic of Moldova will receive support from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in order to increase industrial productivity, stimulate the entrepreneurial environment, encourage innovation and use best practices for full integration into European Union markets and global value chains.

These, as well as other important goals were discussed during the launch of the UNIDO Country Program for Inclusive and Sustainable Development in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2019-2023. The framework program will focus on developing and strengthening the global value chain, developing export capacities, developing tourism, increasing energy efficiency in industrial processes, rural development, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, competitiveness and innovation, and not the least – creation of jobs and attracting investments. The launch and implementation of this Program will surely bring added value to multilateral cooperation with both UNIDO and the other development partners of the Republic of Moldova.

Besides the development and good governance component, the relations within the UN also have a pronounced political component. For example, the UN

General Assembly adopted on June 22, 2018, with 64 votes “pro”, 15 “against” and 83 abstentions the Resolution of the Republic of Moldova on the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Transnistrian region. The Czech Republic, Poland and the United Kingdom were co-sponsors of the resolution of the Republic of Moldova. Although Russia strongly opposed and proposed withdrawing the Resolution from the agenda, the proposal was not supported by the Member States. This Resolution can be considered a success of the Moldovan diplomacy, despite the instrumentalization of this step in the context of an obvious artificial antagonization of bilateral relations with the Russian Federation at that time.

Although Moldova is always regarded as a security consumer, our country has actively participated in several peacekeeping missions under the aegis of UN (Ivory Coast, Liberia, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Kosovo). Since 2014, the Republic of Moldova has deployed 11 contingents of National Army troops in the KFOR mission in Kosovo, as part of the Multinational Peacekeeping Force. The decision to send the troops was approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on November 1st, 2013. The peacekeeping mission in Kosovo is carried out in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1244. The first contingent of Moldovan peacekeepers was posted to Kosovo in March 2014, and the 11th was posted in June 2019.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, more than 450 Moldovan officers and under-officers - infantrymen, sappers and senior officers - were dislocated in the period of 2014-2019 in the multinational base “Camp Vilaggio Italia” of the Multinational Group of Forces MNBG-W (Multinational Battle Group - West), from Pech, Kosovo. This experience contributes significantly to increasing the level of training of the National Army staff and increasing the interoperability with our partners. The political decision taken in 2013, although delayed, has increased the credibility of the Republic of Moldova on the international arena with its own contribution to the KFOR mission. Despite its reduced economic and military potential,<sup>43</sup> through this contribution Moldova has positioned itself as a security provider, not just a consumer, as previously perceived.

## **The multilateral cooperation of the Republic of Moldova within the GUAM**

The creation of the consultative forum of four GUAM states (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) took place on October 10th, 1997, in Strasbourg, during the Summit of the Council of Europe. In this document, signed by the four Presidents, the need to develop quadrilateral cooperation for strengthening stability and security in Europe was emphasized based on the following principles:

1. respect for sovereignty;
2. territorial integrity;

<sup>42</sup> KFOR -11 contingent, trained in the field of operational law. <https://www.army.md/?lang=2&action=show&cat=122&obj=5679>

<sup>43</sup> Peacekeeping Contributor Profile: Moldova <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/2015/10/20/peacekeeping-contributor-profile-moldova/>

3. the inviolability of state borders;
4. democracy;
5. the rule of law and respect for human rights.

The Strasbourg Communiqué formally foresees the increasing political rapprochement and the practical intensification of cooperation between these states in several fields, both on the international arena and in bilateral relations. However, the effectiveness of the organization has proven to be sporadic. The first meeting of the GUAM Heads of State took place on June 7th, 2001, which became the most important event in the creation and institutionalization of this regional group as a regional organization. The GUAM Charter establishes the goals, principles and spheres of collaboration of the Member States, these being: strengthening and extending the commercial-economic relations; developing the infrastructure of the transport corridors, by harmonizing the legislative and institutional base in this field and connecting the tariff and customs terms, so that they comply with international standards; international security; the fight with international terrorism, organized crime, illegal migration and drug trafficking.

The GUAM Presidency-in-Office was held in 2018 by the Republic of Moldova. During September 27-28, 2018, Moldova hosted the 11th annual meeting of the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly. It was discussed during the meeting: prospects for sectoral cooperation between GUAM member states; Information security in the GUAM region: new challenges, ob-

jectives and joint efforts to counter these challenges; GUAM on the international arena: activity and relations of GUAM member countries within international organizations. Moldova also hosted the 7th annual meeting of PA GUAM in Chisinau, on November 10-11, 2014. Unfortunately, the organization has entered in the last decade in a state of lethargy from which it fails to come out despite some efforts in recent years. The Presidency is exercised in 2019 by Ukraine, but the Republic of Moldova ignored the meeting of the Speakers of the GUAM Parliaments in Kiev, preferring a meeting within the CIS. This gesture is a bold one on the realignment of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova.

Despite comprehensive cooperation strategies within GUAM, based on the "Vision Document" of the Georgian Presidency presented in Tbilisi, October 8, 2017, the organization has not achieved any success in the process of implementing the proposed objectives. The efforts to implement the agreement on the creation of the Free Trade Area in the GUAM area have not evolved significantly. This lack of progress is regrettable, considering the added value of this project from an economic and political point of view. In this context, it is necessary to develop an expertise of the real capacities correlated with the strategic objectives of GUAM to increase the efficiency of the organization. The initiative of the GUAM Secretariat is also welcomed to set up an investment fund for international projects. In order to strengthen the multilateral cooperation within GUAM, it is necessary to strengthen the legal framework of the organization. Only then can the viability

of the organization be relaunched and assured, which was once very promising.

Among the few successes of cooperation within the Organization, the development of international transport within the perimeter of the GUAM corridor can be highlighted, as well as the development of the GUAM transport corridor. Discussions began on the possibility of eliminating roaming charges between the Organization's member countries. An important aspect is that the Organization has been perceived since the foundation as a platform meant to counterbalance Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space, especially in the energy field, by enhancing the infrastructure and inter-connecting the gas and oil pipelines. Due to the lack of cohesion between the Member States, but also due to lack of vision, strategic planning and political stability in the Member States, the organization has not yet reached its potential.

## **The multilateral cooperation of the Republic of Moldova with the Council of the Europe – PACE**

The history of the relations of the Council of Europe with the Republic of Moldova began in 1995, being based on the values of promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Council of Europe is working to support the Republic of Moldova in order to comply with the standards of the Organization and the rule of law through a series of mechanisms that monitor the evolution of the Republic of Moldova in these aspects. Therefore, our country is under formal monitoring of the Council of Europe

since 1995, and the graduation by the Republic of Moldova from this process will indicate the attainment of a high level of respect for the democratic norms in our country.

The Action Plan of the Council of Europe for the Republic of Moldova 2017-2020 was approved by the Committee of Ministers in February 2017. The Action Plan is a strategic programming tool aimed at further aligning Moldovan legislation, institutions and practice with European standards concerning human rights, the rule of law and democracy, supporting, thus, the country in fulfilling its obligations as a member state of the Council of Europe. In addition, the Action Plan reflects the priorities of the reforms in the country, including those identified in the National Development Strategy "Moldova 2020", the National Strategy for decentralization and other sectoral strategies.

The assistance of the Council of Europe covers multiple policy areas, including the functioning of democratic institutions, with a greater focus on constitutional and electoral issues, fighting corruption, supporting justice sector reform, strengthening the capacities of national human rights institutions, combating ill-treatment and impunity, combating trafficking in human beings, support for media freedom and pluralism, support for education for democratic citizenship, local democracy and decentralization, as well as strengthening trust between people on both banks of the Nistru river.

The assistance programs of the Council of Europe implemented in the Republic of Moldova also include a series of joint re-



gional programs of the European Union and the Council of Europe carried out under the Good Governance Partnership (GGP). The actions envisaged in the GGP are dedicated to strengthening the reform in the justice sector, supporting free and fair elections, combating corruption and cyber crimes.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is an important political platform for the Republic of Moldova. Resolutions in recent years of this European forum have highlighted the anti-democratic slippage of the Government in Chisinau. In fact, former CoE Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland was the first international high ranking official to speak about the Republic of Moldova in the context of a captured state.<sup>44</sup> This international public pressure has served as a catalyst for several organizations and leaders of the Member States to take a stand against political events in Moldova.

Perhaps the most sought institutions within the Council of Europe in relation to the Republic of Moldova are the European Court of Human Rights and the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). Namely these institutions, along with the multiple resolutions of the PACE, on the one hand highlight the deficiencies of the judicial, legislative and constitutional system, and on the other hand, contribute significantly to the improvement of these deficiencies. The contribution of these two institutions to the feeble democracy and the rule of law in the Republic of Moldova are difficult to underestimate.

44 Thorbjørn Jagland. Bring Moldova Back From the Brink. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/opinion/bring-moldova-back-from-the-brink.html>

The ECHR is the last refuge for those wronged by the national courts. The ECHR has delivered since 1997 over 400 decisions in Moldovan cases. The most common types of violations found by the ECHR in Moldovan cases are non-execution of court decisions, ill-treatment, inadequate investigation of ill-treatment and deaths, imprisonment in bad conditions, improper cancellation of irrevocable court decisions.<sup>45</sup> Based on the ECHR judgments and decisions issued until November 1st, 2019, the Republic of Moldova was obliged to pay compensations of approximately EUR 17,000,000.

The Court found that the Convention was violated or is in the process of examining of many cases with major social and political impact for our society: the Ilașcu, Mușuc, Hyde Park, Brega, Genderdoc-M, Tănase, Brăguța, Petrenco, Filat cases.<sup>46</sup> The case of the Turkish teachers, the struggle between the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and that of Moldova, the situation of the Romanian schools in the Transnistrian region, and other cases have major impact not only on the internal policy, but also have profound external implications. Therefore, we can say that the ECHR is also an indirect mechanism for promoting the interests of the Republic of Moldova through “naming and shaming” in the context in which, for example, the Russian Federation or Turkey are concerned.

However, if the ECHR’s decisions against

45 21 years of ECHR in the Republic of Moldova. <https://crjm.org/21-ani-de-cedo-in-republica-moldova/>

46 Summary of violations found by the European Court of Human Rights regarding the Republic of Moldova 12 September 1997 - 31 December 2017. <https://crjm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Violari-20-de-ani.pdf>



Moldova are most often of an individual nature, the rights of some natural or legal persons being harmed, the Venice Commission offers *amicus curiae* on matters of comparative and international constitutional law, thus directly affecting the whole society. Even though the Commission has an advisory role, it is an institution respected because of its independence. In our case, the Commission is an institution that has been increasingly requested lately in the context of justice reform. Though the Commission expressed its vision before the amendment of the electoral legislation in 2017, when the PDM and the PSRM voted to introduce the mixed voting system, the Commission's opinion was ignored.

Nevertheless, the worst political crisis in the history of the Republic of Moldova took place in June 2019. The Commission was notified then by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe himself, Thorbjørn Jagland. The opinion was unprecedented - for the first time in history the Venice Commission expressed its opinion on decisions issued by a constitutional court.<sup>47</sup> Those suspicious decisions of the Court on how to calculate the three-month term, in which the Government was to be invested, the Venice Commission mentioned that "it is unprecedented the Court's manner of calculating the three-month time limit for the formation of a government. According to the accepted calculation of the three months limit foreseen in the Civil Code, which was previously applied by the Constitutional

Court, the time frame for forming a new government expired on 9 June, three calendar months after the confirmation of the election results. 9 June being a Sunday, the applicable deadline was possibly 10 June. Therefore, the Commission says, Maia Sandu's investiture on 8 June met the legal deadline", the Venice Commission statement states.<sup>48</sup>

Even if the former Speaker of the Parliament, the democrat Andrian Candu, tried to downplay in advance the importance of the opinion that the Venice Commission, which should have issued next week after the controversial decisions of the Constitutional Court, including on the presence of the conditions for dissolution of the Parliament, the Commission's message had a considerable impact on society, but also on the way the events were perceived by the foreign partners. In a desperate attempt to save the situation, Candu said that any decision taken by the Venice Commission cannot be binding on the Moldovan authorities, and only as a recommendation.<sup>49</sup> However, the Commission's opinion, which could be anticipated, contributed to the peaceful and relatively rapid resolution of the political and constitutional crisis of June 2019. Therefore, even if politicians can be selective in how they perceive the role and opinions of the Commission, the importance of the Venice Commission for the political system in the Republic of Moldova is hard to underestimate.

47 Verdict of the Venice Commission regarding Moldova, as a sentence of usurpation of power in the state. <https://www.dw.com/ro/verdict-al-comisiei-de-la-vene%C8%9Bia-viz%C3%A2nd-moldova-c%C3%A2t-o-sentin%C8%9B%C4%83-de-uzurpare-a-puterii-%C3%AEn-stat/a-49297980>

48 Venice Commission: the dissolution of parliament in the Republic of Moldova did not meet the required conditions. [https://search.coe.int/directorate\\_of\\_communications/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680950b36](https://search.coe.int/directorate_of_communications/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680950b36)

49 What the Venice Commission can and cannot do. <https://molдова.europalibera.org/a/ce-poate-%C8%99ice-nu-poate-comisia-de-la-vene%C5%A3ia/29999517.html>

## Conclusions and recommendations

The bilateral, as well as the multilateral cooperation of the Republic of Moldova with the USA, UN, GUAM and CoE has been determined in the last years by a sinusoidal evolution, determined, on the one hand, by the internal political processes in the Republic of Moldova, and on the other hand, by nature of the geopolitical and geo-economic priorities of the region. There are opportunities to redress the setbacks and loopholes of the recent years, but the success of the Republic of Moldova in its foreign policy remains closely linked to the ability of domestic political actors to find reasonable compromises, which would add value in promoting the national interests of the Republic of Moldova.

Given that the Republic of Moldova is anchored on the European integration agenda, but still continues to be dependent on the Russian Federation in many respects, the strategic partnership and dialogue with the US must remain the cornerstone of Moldova's foreign policy. As long as our country is not of strategic interest to Washington D.C., Chisinau must make sustained efforts to stay on the radar of US foreign policy and to benefit from the support and multi-dimensional assistance of the US government.

The Republic of Moldova must further capitalize on the opportunities offered by the UN, but at the same time must continue to support the organization's efforts in both the social-economic and political-military fields. So that our country is perceived not only as a consumer of

assistance and security in the region, but more and more as a security provider by participating in peacekeeping missions, both military and civilian.

The Republic of Moldova needs to capitalize on the opportunities offered by GUAM in the economic, as well as in the political field, by strengthening the efforts to build the transport and energy infrastructure connections in the region. Likewise, the efficiency of the relations in the commercial field must be a priority. However, the experience of the ten years does not leave much room for optimism in order to make the activity of this regional organization more efficient.

The Council of Europe must remain a priority for the multilateral foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova. Chisinau needs to be more skilled and creative in promoting its interests on this platform. The delegation of the Republic of Moldova to the PACE should be more careful in its positions and votes cast in the Assembly plenary. The ECHR must remain that last refuge for the unjust, but the Republic of Moldova must adjust its own legislation and administrative practices so that it has as few convictions as possible. At the same time, the Venice Commission must remain that independent external arbitrator in an unstable and often too flexible internal political climate in the field of constitutional jurisprudence.

# Moldova-NATO Partnership: from modernizing the security and defense sector to societal security

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The relations between the Republic of Moldova and the North-Atlantic Alliance have been established, naturally, once with the declaration of independence and the foreshadowing of a foreign policy with a pro-Western vision on the one hand, and the Alliance's desire to reform and transform into a politico-military structure, on the other hand. The neutrality status of the Republic of Moldova written down in the constitution and respected by the Euro-Atlantic partners, establishes from the beginning the level and the limits of the cooperation, which often represent a topic of discussions but also divergences of political-social nature.

Although the word NATO was a taboo for the Moldovan society, the cooperation was kept and developed periodically regardless of the political situation in Chisinau. The east - west geopolitical paradigm, which is prevalent in the political, social and economic life of the Republic of Moldova, remains crucial in the process of transforming the cooperation relations, having a difficult word to say including in the process of public assimilation of the positive results of the partnership.

The purpose of this work is primarily to review the main developments in the relations of cooperation between the Republic of Moldova - NATO, as well as to

identify and explain the major challenges at the level of institutional cooperation but also public perception. Also, attention is paid to opportunities for partnership development under the political and geopolitical conditions existing at regional and international level.

## Institutional cooperation framework Republic of Moldova - NATO

### Partnership for Peace

Understanding the geopolitical sensitivity of the Eastern European region, and not only, on December 20th, 1991, in Brussels, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) was created with the purpose of establishing a permanent forum for consultations on European security issues with the states which are not NATO members. Moldova joined the Council in 1992, and later in 1997 this format of cooperation was succeeded by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the purpose remaining the same. However, the practical cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and NATO began with the signing, in 1994, of the Program "Partnership for Peace" (PfP) framework document, thus Moldova becoming the 12th country that joined the PfP. Within the CIS states, the Republic of Moldova was the second country to join the PfP after Ukraine, a step that demonstrated, at that time, the desire for deeper cooperation but also the Euro-Atlantic development course.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Republic of Moldova – NATO relations, <https://www.>

Although Moldova cooperates with NATO in different fields, the actions envisaged in the bilateral cooperation format are directly focused on supporting the efforts of the Republic of Moldova to reform the security and defense sector at the level of structures and institutions.

Thanks to the cooperation within the PfP, the Republic of Moldova benefits from the expertise and experience of NATO member states and partners in areas such as: reform of the armed forces, assistance in the training of the staff, language training of the National Army officers, all of them allowing the increase of the capabilities of the armed forces but also the transformation of the military structures and their modernization. An aspect, not less important, is ensuring the access to information, statistics, sources of political, technical and financial assistance offered by PfP. Thanks to the cooperation with NATO, the Republic of Moldova contributes to preserving international security, PfP allowing the acquaintance of the Moldovan military with the way of carrying out peacekeeping operations. To date, the Republic of Moldova has participated and continues to participate in several peacekeeping missions under the aegis of NATO, OSCE and UN, among which we can mention:

NATO-led KFOR operation in Kosovo: On March 8, 2014, the Republic of Moldova deployed its contingent of 41 soldiers (one platoon - 33 military, a demining team - 7 military and a weather expert). Every 6 months, the contingent rotation of the Republic of Moldova takes place.

Between 2003 and 2008, 6 contingents of Moldovan military (over 100 people in total) participated in the post-conflict humanitarian mission in Iraq.

UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan - UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan): During 2008-2014, 4 military transport helicopters of the National Army MI-8 carried out personnel transport and logistics assurance missions within the mission.

Since 2003, more than 70 Moldovan military have participated in international missions under the UN auspices in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sudan, South Sudan and Georgia. At present, 8 Moldovan military are active in UN peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and South Sudan.<sup>51</sup>

During the years 1997-1999, the first OSCE mission of the National Army was undertaken in Chechnya, where two Moldovan officers participated. From October 1998 to March 1999, three officers were active in the Kosovo Verification Mission. 8 soldiers participated in the OSCE Mission in Georgia in the period 2000-2002, and between 2001-2002, two officers of the National Army participated in the OSCE Mission in Macedonia. 17 officers of the National Army of the Republic of Moldova participated in various OSCE missions (Chechnya - 2, Macedonia - 2, Georgia - 13) by 2013.<sup>52</sup>

Starting with 1995, the Republic of Moldova implements the Individual Partner-

<sup>51</sup> Republic of Moldova – NATO relations, <https://www.mfa.gov.md/ro/content/relatiile-republica-moldova-nato>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.army.md/?lng=2&action=show&cat=163>

ship Program (IPP), which in 2014 was replaced by the Partnership Cooperation Menu (PCM). PCM allows employees of Moldovan public structures to participate in conferences, seminars, workshops, training courses, practical exercises on different topics organized by NATO in areas such as: reform of the armed forces, control of armaments and disarmament, civil protection, prevention and resolution of crisis situations, combating terrorism, planning and conducting joint peacekeeping operations and preparing staff. In 1997, Republic of Moldova took an important step in the process of initiating the military reform by joining PARP, a program aimed at reforming the armed forces, developing military interoperability with the Alliance forces as well as developing the capacity of the Republic of Moldova to participate in international peacekeeping operations. In this context, on December 16th, 1997, the Mission of the Republic of Moldova to NATO was established, aiming to coordinate activities on the NATO<sup>53</sup> line and maintain dialogue with allied states.

To further support the modernization efforts and the defense reform itself, at the NATO summit in Wales on September 4-5, 2014, the Republic of Moldova was invited to participate in 2 new initiatives launched by the Alliance, namely: The Defense Capacity Building Initiative (DCBI) and Interoperability Platform (IP). As a continuation, on June 24th, 2015, the defense ministers of the NATO states approved the Assistance Package for the Republic of Moldova within the Defense Capacity Building Initiative (DCBI). The

DCBI, as a whole, may include different types of assistance, from strategic consulting on defense and security sector reform and institution building, to the development of local forces through education and training or consulting and assistance in specialized fields, such as logistics or cyber defense. In the Republic of Moldova, the purpose of this program is to strengthen the defense capabilities through two stages: international assistance in the development of defense policies and providing financial assistance, including by establishing trust funds for the Republic of Moldova.

Thus, the following were accomplished:

1) The project of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova was elaborated with the support of the Alliance experts, subsequently withdrawn in 2017 by President Igor Dodon for review. The document has not been updated so far; the defence policies elaborated afterwards refer strictly to the 2011 National Security Strategy. In July 2018, the National Defense Strategy of the Republic of Moldova was approved, a document that sets out the objectives and tasks in the field of defense. Later, in October 2018, the Military Strategy of the Republic of Moldova was approved, which also includes a review of the armed forces structure.

2) In 2019, the second phase began, namely providing practical assistance for the development of the defense and security capabilities of the Republic of Moldova.

In parallel with the two steps mentioned above, Republic of Moldova has also ben-

53 Ibidem

edited from other programs offered by NATO such as: strengthening the integrity in the security and defense sector, implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on the role of women in promoting peace and security, cyber defense and strategic communication (StratCom) both at policy development and training levels. Participation in the Building Integrity (BI) program assists Moldova in its agenda of eradicating corruption by evaluating policies, strengthening anti-corruption practices, providing training and education to civilian and military personnel. Thus, by contributing to reducing the risk of corruption in the defense and security sector and strengthening integrity, accountability, transparency and good governance, NATO programs interlink with the association agenda of the Republic of Moldova.

An important event was also the opening of the NATO liaison office in Chisinau, on December 8th, 2017, which plays an important role in providing public information about NATO and in explaining the support given to the Republic of Moldova.

Although the opportunities offered by NATO partnership are major, both for the development and training of institutions and for the professional development of individuals, the lack of a comprehensive vision for reform and medium and long-term planning, including professional human capital, jeopardizes progress and reduces the speed of reforms to the maximum. Capitalizing of the existing programs and projects in terms of institutions and human resources is conditioned by the political situation in the country, taking into account the fact that, to date,

the society in the Republic of Moldova remains divided between east and west, often artificially, under the influence of political discourses. The political agenda of the Republic of Moldova, the frequent internal political crises, the regional security discourse, but also the geopolitical factor are hampering the country's capacities to capitalize on NATO's assistance, thus also undermining the country's capacity to strengthen its defense capabilities. The partnership between the Republic of Moldova and NATO is based on the principle of cooperation according to requests, which allows interaction at different speeds but also preserving the continuous nature of the dialogue.

## **Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP)**

The Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) Republic of Moldova - NATO was adopted by the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the Government of the Republic of Moldova in May 2006 and was subsequently updated in August 2010, July 2014 and September 2017. Following the evaluation on the 2017-2019 IPAP, a new document should be negotiated. The primary purpose of the IPAP is to promote the reforms regarding the modernization of the security and defense sector involving all state institutions. The objective pursued by the Republic of Moldova through the implementation of IPAP is to enhance the country's ability to ensure its own security and to transform itself from a consumer of security into a country providing security

IPAP is a document that folds under the European Association agenda of the Re-



public of Moldova, aiming at a series of objectives such as deepening cooperation with Euro-Atlantic structures and institutions, promoting democratic reforms and practices in various fields, strengthening democratic control of the armed forces. One of the major advantages of this cooperation format is that the opportunities and areas of cooperation can be extended depending on the needs of the partner, in this case of the Republic of Moldova. One of the major shortcomings of the Republic of Moldova, but also the reason why IPAP-type documents are not capitalized is the low capacity of the institutions to assimilate the assistance, but also the lack of communication culture and institutional interoperability.

## Scientific cooperation

Since 1997, the Republic of Moldova has participated in the Science for Peace and Security Program (SPS) thus developing the scientific side of NATO cooperation. Initially, NATO supported 2 projects of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Moldova worth about \$ 153,000 USD. Projects aimed at establishing the information network of the Academy of Sciences and maintaining the informational network of the Polytechnic Community also obtained NATO support through SPS. Environmental security is an area of specific interest for the projects within the SPS program. As a result of identifying the need for assistance on this sector, during 2005–2007 with NATO support, a project aimed at managing the waters of the Nistru and Prut rivers was developed. The project focused on establishing a mechanism for continuous testing of the pollution level of the two rivers and

alerting if this level would exceed the critical parameters.<sup>54</sup>

Today, the cooperation within the SPS focuses on defense against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear agents, as well as activities on cyber defense, counter-terrorism and border security. NATO helped Moldova set up a cyber defense laboratory at the Technical University of Moldova and a mobile biological laboratory to counter the threats from biological agents such as anthrax.<sup>55</sup>

Also, with the assistance of the SPS program, the Moldovan government in partnership with civil society and other international actors, UN Women specifically, developed in March 2018 its first national action plan<sup>56</sup> on promoting the role of women in defense and security. This Plan contributes to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda set out in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions.

## Implementation of bilateral projects through other NATO assistance mechanisms

NATO has contributed through various instruments to the accomplishment of some humanitarian projects including in the Republic of Moldova. The signing

<sup>54</sup> Cooperation in the scientific field, SPS, <https://www.mfa.gov.md/ro/content/cooperarea-domeniul-stiintific>

<sup>55</sup> Country Flyer 2018, SPS, <https://www.nato.int/science/country-flyers/Moldova.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> DECISION No. 259 of March 28, 2018 regarding the approval of the National Program for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security for the years 2018–2021 and of the Action Plan on its implementation



on June 28th, 2001, of the Memorandum of Understanding with the NATO Organization for Maintenance and Supply (NAMSO) on cooperation in the field of logistics allowed the creation of a Special Affection Fund in 2002. It allowed the implementation of the project aimed at the destruction of 11,872 antipersonnel mines and 250 cubic meters of mixed missile fuel, the cost of the project amounting to \$ 1.1 million.<sup>57</sup>

Another major project implemented in cooperation with NATO is the Project on the destruction of pesticides and dangerous chemicals launched on May 12, 2006. The project was implemented in 3 stages:<sup>58</sup>

1. November 2006 - July 2007 - Centralized packing and storage of 1700 tons of pesticides. For these works, NATO states allocated 841 thousand euros.
2. February 2005 - January 2009 - Identification of the chemical composition of pesticides. NATO offered to the Republic of Moldova a grant of 143 thousand euros for the set-up of a Laboratory used to identify unknown pesticides.
3. February 2010 - June 2018 - Destruction of 1269 tones of pesticides. For the implementation of this stage from the allied and partner states, the amount of 2 200 000 euros was collected, out of which 325 thousand euros allocated represented the Republic of Moldova's contribution to the project.

## How is NATO perceived in the Republic of Moldova

Although the neutrality status of the Republic of Moldova which is enshrined in the constitution and respected by the Euro-Atlantic partners, clearly establishes, from the beginning, the level and limits of the cooperation, often the relationship of the Republic of Moldova with NATO is a subject of political-social discussions and divergences. The east - west geopolitical paradigm, predominant in the political, social and economic life of the Republic of Moldova, remains a determining factor in the process of assimilation by our public of the country's partnership with NATO, a possible accession being perceived as a potential risk for regional destabilization.

The potential NATO membership is presented in the form of a situational narrative as a serious danger that is further strengthened by the strategic narrative inherited from the Cold War, namely the expansion of the NATO military bloc. Through well-directed messages, it is presented, on the one hand, as a threat to the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova, and on the other, as a step that could trigger the direct confrontation with Russia, thus endangering security in the East European space. However, there was no serious discussion on the concept of national security and how the Republic of Moldova sees the development of its relations from the perspective of security and defense in the public space.

According to the May 2018 Barometer of Public Opinion, 20.8% of the respondents would vote for a possible accession to

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.md/ro/content/proiecte-pentru-moldova>

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem

Table No. 1

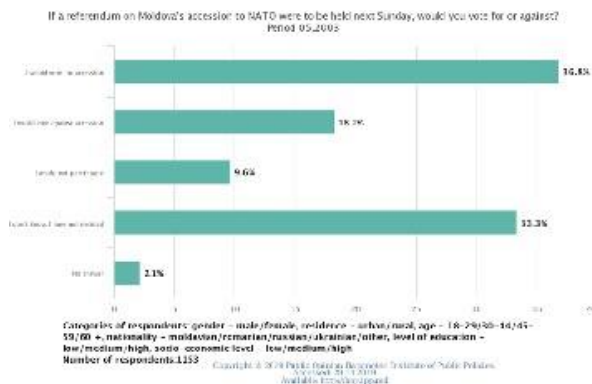
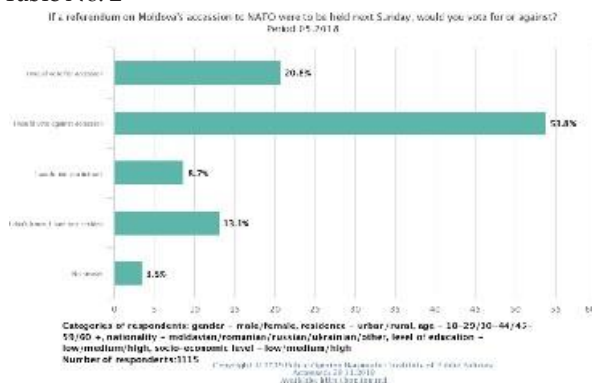


Table No. 2



NATO, this figure decreasing compared to March 2003 when the percentage was 36.8% and the number of undecided respondents was 33.3%. Concluding, we can see that over the years, the information space in the Republic of Moldova has been massively under the influence of the Russian Federation, the Russian narratives being widespread. NATO is still perceived in the Republic of Moldova more as a political-military bloc with an enlargement agenda than a development and modernization partner in the field of defense and security.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The Republic of Moldova fully benefits from cooperation with NATO, the agenda being guided by the national interests of Moldova and its express requests. Currently we cannot identify another more viable and constructive partnership that would contribute to the development of military capabilities but also the security and defense policy framework. However, although the communication campaigns about NATO in the Republic of Moldova

have increased, the results of cooperation with NATO are not known, as much as we would like to, by the general public, nor are they presented institutionally, in a format that could contribute to change of perception.

The strategy of keeping - low profile - which is often followed by institutions, can bring benefits for the continuation and development of the partnership at a certain stage but does not allow the outline of a new image, of a stable and trustworthy image of NATO as Republic Moldova's partner. As long as the citizen will not be targeted in direct communication in order to explain the benefits of the partnership, NATO's image will not change, and the hearts of Moldovan citizens will continue to be influenced by the information flows that are most often generated by elements of the hybrid war.

At the same time, the diversification of the relations with the Euro-Atlantic partners, the intensification of the cooperation and its strengthening depends on the political will and the maturity of the political class in Chisinau in approaching a unitary security and defence vision of the Republic of Moldova outlines by the main national interests and not the geopolitical clichés.



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