

The National Interest and Foreign Policy of the United States and the Republic of Moldova after 2020 Presidential Elections

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Summary

- *The elections of Joseph Biden and Maia Sandu as presidents of the United States and the Republic of Moldova represent a change in the political landscape in both countries and open a possibility to refresh the cooperation between the two countries.*
- *The great power and a small power could benefit from reciprocal collaboration and advance their national interests and gains in areas such as security, democracy and good governance, anti-corruption, environment protection, and public diplomacy.*
- *The Republic of Moldova, a small power, could adopt a strategy of “small but smart” state, to use its smallness as advantage to develop and deepen its national interest in collaboration with the United States.*

Introduction

In the fall of 2020, both the United States and the Republic of Moldova held presidential elections, and in both countries the democratic candidates were victorious. The election of democratic presidential candidates in both countries represent the beginning of a new political cycle and could become a fresh opportunity for cooperation between the United States and the Republic of Moldova. Although the U.S.-Moldova relationship is branded as the great power – small power relationship, the new democratic leadership could provide new opportunities for cooperation.

How much the newly elected leaders can revive the relationship between the U.S. and Moldova are the questions analyzed in this article. How will this potential materialize or the relationship might look like business as usual? To examine the cooperation between the United States and the Republic of Moldova in this article the foreign policy is analyzed from the perspective of national interest, the correlation between the great and small powers, and the opportunity for a small state to advance its national interest.

The national interest and foreign policy

Statesmen and scholars used the term 'national interest' since the founding of the nation-states to describe the goals and aspirations of sovereign entities in the international arena. Though there is no accepted definition among scholars, national interest is defined mostly as the "perceived needs and desires of one sovereign state in relation to another sovereign state in the international environment".¹ Governments, and particularly national leaders are those who define national interest and the foreign policy strategies to promote the national interest on the global stage. The concept of national interest is usually associated with international relations, as internal politics operates within the notion of public interest.

Although it seems clear at first look, the concept of national interest is analyzed in the context of different school of thoughts and the configuration of global political systems.² And while examined in the context of different doctrines, the researchers agree that national interest is rooted in a state's goals to pursue the following purposes: 1) sovereignty and security of the state, 2) economic wealth and growth, 3) world order, and 4) ideology and values. And all those are subjects to cost evaluation. In other words, the governments, and their foreign policy decision-makers, would evaluate the costs for the states to pursue those actions on the world stage.

Foreign policy is interlinked with the goal of promoting the national interest, although transforming the concept of national interest in working foreign policy strategy is a much more complex task. The foreign policy decision-making process is not only attributed to the military and diplomatic professionals, but it's closely related to the state's leaders' worldview.³ The national leaders are determined to promote the national interest, but nevertheless, their foreign policy strategies, tactics, and approaches might vary. The variations are regarding the differences over goals (to pursue national security or to spread democracy) and means (to use force or diplomacy).⁴

Another aspect of the analysis of national interest and foreign policy worth mentioning is in the context of great powers and small states' relationship. The national interests and foreign policy of great powers are traditionally analyzed as asymmetrical relations with small states. The abundance of resources and capabilities give great powers the possibility to pursue their goals in different parts of the world, to originate foreign policy initiatives, and to follow up on them.⁵ The small states are certainly disadvantaged in the international system, having a small size and population, being militarily weak, and having a lesser domestic market.

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- 1 Pham, Peter. *What Is in the National Interest? Hans Morgenthau's Realist Vision and American Foreign Policy*. *American Foreign Policy Interests. The Journal of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy*. Vol. 37, 2015. Is. 4.
 - 2 Nuechterlein, Donald. *America Recommitted. A Superpower Assesses Its Role in a Turbulent World*. The University of Kentucky. 2001.
 - 3 Mead, Walter Russell. *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*. Routledge, 2002, 400 p.
 - 4 Nau, Henry R. *Conservative Internationalism: Armed Diplomacy under Jefferson, Polk, Truman, and Reagan*. Princeton University Press. 2015. 341 p.
 - 5 Neack, Laura. *The New Foreign Policy. Complex Interactions, Competing Interests*. New Millennium Books in International Studies. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2014. 245 p.

Nonetheless, by analyzing and reflecting on their challenges, opportunities, and consequences of their strategic choices, the small states can adopt different strategies and advance their national interest. The small state can employ the strategy of “small but smart”⁶ state on the international stage and manage to extend their influence. The important aspect of “small but smart” states are proactive attitude and to take initiative within the alliances, international organizations, and in their interstate relations, in order to maximize their influence. In the case of small states creativity, flexibility and expertise play a great role in advancing their national interest.

In the security sector, counterweighing for the weak military, small states could rely on promoting diplomatic relations, or could serve “some functions in the strategies of the great powers”. Small states could partner with individual big states “through relationships” and join the “status holding great powers”, such as the U.S. or E.U.⁷ Prioritizing their efforts and focusing on policy sectors of greater importance and/or where they can gain more direct benefits, small states can promote their national interest in the economic sector. By changing the narrative that the small states are not “the problem” but could become “the solution” the small states can rearticulate smallness and depart from the terms of “constraint”.⁸ In international climate politics, small states could use their advantage as not being a great emitter because of their smallness and can concentrate their effort on particular green projects.

As seen lately, with the rebirth of geostrategic and ideological competition, notably between China, Russia on the one side, and the United States and the European Union on the other side, the small states now are facing the dilemma of two ideological paths they could follow. The Western world is pursuing democratic values, a free market, transparency, and a corruption-free world. The democratic societies are defining their national interest as representing the interest of all citizens, regardless of their race, nationality, and position in society. In contrast, the authoritarian states represent the interest of selected elite groups, showing disregard to the state institutions, division of powers, and rule of law in society. Looking to promote their national interest, the small states also see this dichotomy, and the way they choose can depend on the possibility to ally with different “status holding powers”.

During the 2020 presidential elections in both countries, in the United States and in the Republic of Moldova the foreign policy agenda was not the dominant issue during the elections campaign, furthermore, the major candidates run on internal issues and topics in both countries. But the foreign policy was part of the candidates’ policy programs, although different in both countries. We see the change in foreign policy strategies for both winning leaders, in Washington as well as in Chisinau. How are both countries going to reset their foreign policy and reconsider the relationship between the two countries to better suit their national interest?

6 Kouskouvelis, I. *Smart leadership in a small state: the case of Cyprus*, in A. Tziampiris & S. Litsas (eds.) *The Eastern Mediterranean in Transition: Multipolarity, Politics and Power*, Abingdon: Routledge, p. 93-117.

7 T. Mathisen, *The functions of the small states in the strategy of the great powers*, Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1971, p. 287.

8 Lee, D. and Smith, N.J. (2010) *Small State Discourses in the International Political Economy*. *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (7): 1091-1105.

The United States national interest and foreign policy initiatives after 2020 presidential elections

In the 2020 U.S. presidential election the foreign policy or candidates' worldviews on international relations were not predominant during the election campaign. Even so, the foreign policy issues had a tangential impact on the electoral decision of American voters, as to restore the U.S. image in the world as the leading democratic and freedom promoter. The newly elected President Joe Biden announced his foreign policy agenda and promise "to restore" the democratic leadership role of the U.S. in the world,⁹ and to reverse Trump's nationalist and populist agenda. Biden's foreign program echoes the previous American presidents' agenda to continue promoting U.S.'s national interests abroad, but the proposed methods and approaches differ from Trump's.

Biden plans to include and elevate the use of diplomacy, restore the strategic NATO partnership, renegotiate the arms control agreements, revise the trade deals, reinstate the U.S. cooperation with international organizations, and most significantly, reassure U.S. leadership in advancing the democratic values around the world.

Although Biden is planning a swift and dramatic reverse in global orientation, he cannot just restore the pre-Trump reality. The world has changed, and the decline of democratic freedom,¹⁰ the slowdown of globalization trends, the changing nature of power and conflicts, will demand from President Biden new approaches and policies. The new global realities will place new challenges on the incoming Biden administration and at the forefront of American foreign policy goals, rather than his version of traditional Democratic Party realism.

Besides that, Biden is facing internal challenges, as the U.S. is divided as never before along the partisan lines, and his victory of the popular vote didn't translate into vigorous congressional power. He will have to maneuver between foreign and domestic policy and perform a balanced policymaking act with a tight Democratic majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The United States cooperation with the Republic of Moldova

Biden's foreign policy program has several priorities, which could be decoded not only as of the promotion of the U.S. national interests but also serve as a suitable possibility for small states to arise on the orbit of America's attention. The following foreign policy orientations are dominant according to the new administration:

- Biden emphasizes that the United States' would promote closer relationship and cooperation with **strategic allies** and rebuild the **US-NATO strategic partnership**. Biden stated that

⁹ *The Power of America's Example: The Biden Plan For Leading the Democratic World to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century. Joe Biden Delivers Foreign Policy Address in New York City. July 11, 2019. <https://joebiden.com/americanleadership/#> (Accessed on November 26, 2020)*

¹⁰ *A leaderless Struggle for Democracy. Freedom in the World 2020. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy> (Accessed November 26, 2020)*

the United States' greatest foreign policy accomplishment has been the investment in collective security and prosperity and partnership with U.S. security allies. He announced that as president he would work to restore American credibility toward nuclear nonproliferation by leading the U.S. back to the Iran nuclear deal and to prevent a new arms race with China and Russia.

The United States, which is considered to be the most powerful country, has primarily **strategic interest** in the Republic of Moldova, and is one of the largest strategic partners of Moldova. Within this framework, the U.S. could continue building on the existing Strategic Dialogue United States – Republic of Moldova of 2014, and advance the coordination and consultation between the representatives of the Foreign Minister of Moldova and the U.S. Department of State, and increase the effectiveness of Working Groups in the fields of energy, security, and rule of law.

Another channel for strategic cooperation is to advance the bilateral partnership between the state of North Carolina and the Republic of Moldova (MD-NC Partnership), launched in 1999. The potential for strengthening the cooperation includes not only the areas of defense but as well civil defense, education, humanitarian projects, and medical assistance. The new possibilities were opened in 2020 by signing two new grassroots Sister-Cities International platform projects.¹¹

A new boost could use the novel area of strategic cooperation, such as cybersecurity. The American effort to strengthen **cybersecurity** could include continuing cooperation in the framework of MITRE Corporation, a U.S. government-funded project. Building a strong cyber capacity in partner nations in dealing with Russian aggression is essential in achieving long-term U.S. success in national security and cybercrime prevention.¹²

The U.S. could boost support for Moldova's peacekeeping operations with training, engineer mission and participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, that would increase the security in the region and on NATO's borders. The United States could use the strategic geopolitical situation of Moldova on the border with the neighboring county of Romania, a NATO member, and advance the strategic partnership in the region.

- Biden revealed his belief that the **promotion of democracy and democratic values** will help the U.S. deal with new global challenges. The new U.S. President wants to convene all democratic nations in a "Summit for Democracy" to discuss advancing human rights and defending against authoritarianism. The promotion of democratic reform can result in joint collaboration with other countries in transition, including Moldova, in expanding human rights and promoting freedom. The U.S. effort to combat Russian disinformation and propaganda could bring new perspectives to Moldova's media environment in their effort to combat disinformation and demystify conspiracy theories. The U.S. could develop a complex strategy and unite the efforts of allied governments, civil society organizations, and the free press and increase collective resilience to disinformation and Russian propaganda operations.

11 *Republic of Moldova – North Carolina Partnership. Embassy of the Republic of Moldova in the United States of America.* <https://sua.mfa.gov.md/en/content/republic-moldova-%E2%80%93-north-carolina-partnership> (accessed on December 10, 2020).

12 *MITRE strengthens cyber capacity of developing nations. MITRE. Solving Problems for a Safer World.* <https://www.mitre.org/publications/project-stories/mitre-strengthens-cyber-capacity-of-developing-nations>

As a complex strategy in the promotion of democracy, Biden prioritizes **fighting corruption** as the major element of democratic judiciary reforms. Biden promised “to rally the allies to combat corruption and kleptocracy, and to hold systems of authoritarian capitalism accountable for greater transparency and participation in a rules-based system.”¹³ It is imperative in this context to deepen the U.S.-Moldova collaboration on the large-scale money - laundering case of Moldovan oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc. The U.S. could use this opportunity to help in deoligarhisation of Moldova’s “capture state” and set a regional example of combating corruption, promoting accountability and the rule of law.

- The new Biden administration could also restore the U.S. leadership on **global health**. Biden is planning on reversing Trump’s imprudent decision during the pandemic to leave the World Health Organization (WHO), which is planned to take full effect on July 6, 2021. By doing so, the new administration would restore the U.S. role to strengthen the world’s collective capacity to prepare for and respond to future pandemics, as well as combat the current one. Biden also advocated strengthening the U.N.’s global health agency, and also he could join Covax, an initiative of 171 countries to develop COVID-19 vaccines and treatments.

This can provide a solid base for cooperation with other nations, including Moldova, on collaborative international efforts to enforce compliance with legally binding International Health Regulations, and support collaborative international efforts to ensure equitable allocation of COVID-19 vaccines. The U.S. provided via the USAID health assistance to Moldova \$1.2 million to help prepare laboratory systems, identify and monitor new cases, and support technical experts for response and training. This assistance builds upon U.S. investments of more than \$42 million in health assistance and more than \$1 billion in total assistance over the past 20 years.¹⁴ Upon providing financial medical assistance, the U.S. should be aware of the use of this issue in the geopolitical battle in Moldova, as the pro-Russian political leaders and media discredited the Western countries’ efforts, and underline Russian and China’s help during the health crisis.¹⁵

- Biden’s approach to **global trade** is less divergent from the previous administration, as economic diplomacy plays an imperative role in promoting the state’s business interests. Biden plans to abandon self-destructive policies while working with other nations to update the World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute resolution mechanism and form a united front against unfair Chinese trade practices. He is planning to start new “fair trade” agreements that balanced enhanced market access with high labor, human rights, and environmental standards.

13 Jake Sullivan, *Biden’s pick for national security advisor, told POLITICO*. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/27/jake-sullivan-biden-national-security-440814>

14 *State Department: the United States is leading the humanitarian and health assistance response to covid-19*. U.S. Department of State fact sheet. <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/mar-2020-us-leading-humanitarian-and-health-assistance-response-covid-19>. (Accessed December 20, 2020).

15 *Pandemia de coronavirus în Moldova: ajutoare din Vest, laude pentru Est. Coronavirus pandemic in Moldova: aid from the West, praise for the East. Stop Fals*. October 27, 2020. <https://stopfals.md/ro/article/pandemia-de-coronavirus-in-moldova-ajutoare-din-vest-laude-pentru-est-180436> (Accessed December 21, 2020)

Trade relations between the United States and Moldova can be described as a relationship between a major global economy and a small market, situated not in the geographical proximity of the U.S. At the same time, the U.S. government promoted programs assisting Moldova in developing a functional market economy, preventing monopolization, creating new jobs and stability, overcoming economic corruption, and backing sustainable development. In 2010, Moldova received \$262 million via the five-year Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact Program for economic development and investment projects in irrigation infrastructure, high-value agricultural production, and road rehabilitation. While the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact program has not been renewed due to corruption concerns, the economic collaboration could be further directed to particular projects and specific ventures. As was mentioned previously in this article, the U.S. support in Moldova's anticorruption reforms could eventually boost sustainable development and broaden U.S.-Moldova economic cooperation.

- President-elect Biden committed to foreign policy cooperation and advancing the U.S. role as a **global development actor**, that impacts policies and actions and include development cooperation and foreign assistance. This can become another avenue of American-Moldovan cooperation and build further on already existing encouraging achievements. According to the U.S. Department of State, since 1992, the U.S. has provided \$1.5 billion in assistance to Moldova to strengthen its democratic institutions, increase prosperity, and secure internationally recognized borders.¹⁶ But to revitalize American central global engagement in foreign assistance, the U.S. should work to bring together the internal actors, and possibly work to replace/improve the 60-year-old Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and provide updated strategic coherence and clear accountability for the provided assistance.
- On **climate change**, the Biden administration could shift the U.S. policy, after his predecessor's withdrawal from the Paris agreement. Biden pledged to bring the U.S. back into Paris Agreement on his first day in office, as well as to renew America's commitment to mitigating climate change. On this policy, the U.S. could cooperate with the Republic of Moldova, a country with vast untapped agrarian potential, on environmental conservation and sustainable development. The U.S. support of Moldova in creating a legal framework to prevent water pollution, to regulate soil erosion, and to facilitate the creation of the national parks system could contribute to the global effort of environmental protection and conservation of natural resources.

After the presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale spoke with then Moldova President-elect Maia Sandu, congratulating her and expressing the U.S. commitment for cooperation. David Hale confirmed several shared priorities between the U.S. and Moldova, on which the United States are looking to advance cooperation: promoting the rule of law, combating corruption, fostering economic growth and supporting Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹⁷

¹⁶ U.S. Relations with Moldova. U.S. Department of States. January 7, 2020.

¹⁷ Under Secretary David Hale's Call with Moldova President –elect Maia Sandu. U.S. Department of State.

The Republic of Moldova's national interest and foreign policy after 2020 presidential elections

The Republic of Moldova, a newly independent country after the dissolution of the Soviet Union determined its national interest as to defend its independence and sovereignty and to establish relationships with other countries. For a small power, geography can be the greatest asset, and especially for Moldova, which is situated between Russia and the European Union. Moldova's geopolitical location became a more preeminent feature when Romania joined the NATO and European Union. The geopolitical strategic location of Moldova could be further of critical consideration for the U.S. in generating regional stability and peaceful collaboration between nations.

Since its independence, Moldova's national interest was determined by the leading parties in power and the political leaders, who maintained Moldova's sovereignty and independence and territorial integrity, and balanced between the pro-Russia or pro-European foreign policy. Furthermore, Moldova signed the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreement with the EU and, at the same time, maintained political and economic relations with neighboring countries and Russia.

National interest is analyzed, as well, from the perspective of national identity, and the identification of "internal identity" and 'external identity'¹⁸ is invoked. For the Republic of Moldova, a state geographically situated between the East and the West, the national identity' identification was promoted, furthermore, in correlation with the foreign policy. After the declaration of independence, we witnessed political leaders, political parties, and presidents of Moldova using foreign policy, as well as identification of national interest for their narrow political advantage, and promoting pro-West or pro-East foreign policy orientation of Moldova.

The 2020 new presidential elections in Moldova represent a new political cycle also from the perspective that the candidate Maia Sandu did not use foreign policy as the major message and the campaign slogan. Sandu promoted another topic – the anti-corruption message during the campaign and united the electorate not in the base of foreign orientation or national/ethnic identification, but on the base of civic identity, as the citizen of the country united against common flagellum. Sandu was able to unite the electorate in the 2020 presidential elections, but the real test for the Moldovan society to prove that could unite and promote national interest will be in the next parliamentary elections, whether they will be anticipated or regular.

In the 2020 presidential elections Maia Sandu defeated Igor Dodon, a pro-Russian candidate and former leader of the Socialist Party. Maia Sandu, a Harvard alumna, a former World Bank economist and prime minister, pledged to strengthen Moldova's institutions of governance and promote Moldova's national interest. She campaigned on a "pragmatic approach" to foreign policy and to promote constructive dialogue with "Ukraine, Romania, European nations, Russia, and the United States".¹⁹

Office of the Spokesperson. November 17, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/under-secretary-hales-call-with-moldovan-president-elect-sandu/>

18 *The Origin of National Interests*. Editors G. Chafetz, M. Spirtas, B. Frankel. Frank Cass Publisher. 1999. P. 415.

19 Programul Partidului Politic "Partidul Actiune si Solidaritate (PAS) <https://unpaspentru.md/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Program-PAS.pdf>

Sandu's balanced and pragmatic approaches to foreign policy are already a significant change from the country's pro-Russian orientation of her predecessor. Dodon concentrated almost exclusively on strengthening ties with Russia, and particularly with Putin, but his achievements in foreign policy were insignificant.

While the proposed foreign policy of the Moldovan President is sound, Maia Sandu will face sizeable challenges, both on the national and international levels. Regarding the national politics: Moldova is a parliamentary republic with limited president's power, and so far, Dodon's Socialist Party controls 37 of the parliament's 101 seats. For Sandu to be able to implement her agenda two conditions need to be met: 1) to trigger early parliamentary elections, and 2) the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) have to make significant gains. If those two options were not accomplished, Sandu's foreign policy vision would be more difficult to implement.

Referring to the regional challenges, Sandu's administration inherited from Dodon different arrangements with Moscow that she could not ignore or neglect. The first issue would be the decision on Moldova's status in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. With Moldova's trade dependence on Russia diminishing, Sandu's could decide to leave the union. Though any prompt decision could be interpreted as a movement against Moscow, and could have an impact on other issues, such as access to the Russian market and the Moldovan diaspora in Russia. Another issue is the negotiation of the separatist Transnistrian conflict, as Sandu would proceed first of all to decriminalize the region, rather than acknowledging the existing situation. It's not so clear how the Transnistrian counterparties, and their Moscow backers, will react if the balance of power would change in the separatist region.

To pursue her foreign policy agenda, Maia Sandu must rely on her existing political resources, which now are not so abundant. This suggests that Sandu will need to aspire to external help and mobilize all extended international multilateral platforms. And without additional support from the European Union and the United States, she will have a hard time implementing her electoral promises.

Moldova's cooperation with the United States

The proposed foreign policy agenda by the elected Moldovan President not only represents the possibility to promote Moldova's national interest but also create necessary conditions for advancing the democratic reforms and assure the national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The geopolitical preferences of Moldova, as pro-European or pro-Russian were not at the top of the list in the 2020 presidential campaign in Moldova. But the foreign policy orientations were present via the announced predilection of values of the two candidates. The voters in Moldova and the diaspora definitely connected with Maia Sandu's emphasis on the pro-democratic values, national interest, and anti-corruption agenda with the pro-European orientation of Moldova.

In contrast, a pro-Russian orientation is not far away from an association with organized crime, corruption and mafia, and the use of other countries, including Moldova, as a big-money laundromat. A total of \$20 billion have been reported to be laundered from Russia through Moldova,²⁰ which makes Moldova even more vulnerable to Russian influence.

20 OCCRP Presents: *The Russian Laundromat. The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OC-*

The following policy priorities were announced by the new Moldovan presidential administration:

- Maia Sandu announced her priority to promote Moldova's national interest, advance **anti-corruption efforts**, and civic renewal. The large-scale corruption and money laundering are Moldova's biggest threats, creating economic turmoil and allowing the "capture state". The pro-democratic candidate Sandu got the electoral support and she could use the opportunity to include international institutions to strengthen the rule of law, in particular the prosecution system, bringing to justice those responsible for the bank fraud and money laundering crimes, and to hold accountable those who ripped off the Moldova people – and the U.S. and European taxpayers, as well.
- Maia Sandu also announced the support for the **justice reform** and promise to approve a new member of the Superior Council of Magistracy and to take measures to encourage the big-money laundering cases, as the 'Theft of the Billion', the concession of Chisinau International Airport, and the financing of the political parties. The new president could boost the anti-corruption effort and the reform of the justice system in Moldova, to increase accountability and assure Western partners that Moldova is a credible partner to promote justice reform and to educate a new generation of law enforcement personnel.
- Among Sandu's proposed priorities is to establish a **balanced foreign policy**, containing good relationships with all neighboring countries, including Romania, the EU, the US, Ukraine, and Russia, as well. The pragmatic approach adopted by the new president fits the small country's model of promoting economic interest and developing trade and lucrative relationships with all neighborhood countries. In this context building on the existing trade relations with the European Union, as well as the United States, which supports the European integration of Moldova, could benefit all. Following this line of thoughts, it's in Moldova's interest to promote anti-corruption reform and to be eligible for the second U.S. economic assistance from the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact project.
- Another priority for the newly elected president Sandu is to mobilize internal and external resources and work together **to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic**. After the presidential elections in Moldova, the representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Chisinau reiterated that all the leaders from Chisinau should work together to fight the pandemic, and reassured that the U.S. will strongly support this effort.²¹

Though Moldova is a parliamentary republic and the president's prerogatives are limited, the newly elected president will definitely pursue a more active and diverse foreign policy as her predecessor. Representing the image of the country abroad, the president can promote and advance the national interest, including cooperation with the U.S. and pursue European integration. The president now has a mandate to become a mobilizing force to create a national plan of economic, social and cultural development. The Moldovan authorities should play an active role and use the country's advantages to pursue concrete, pragmatic goals of advancing national interest, which could play to the interest of the U.S. and E.U.

CRP). <https://www.reportingproject.net/therussianlaundromat/> (Accessed December 28, 2020).

21 Maia Sandu s-a întâlnit cu ambasadorii SUA și UE, dar și cei ai României și Rusiei. Despre ce au discutat. (Maia Sandu met with the US and EU ambassadors, as well as those of Romania and Russia. What they talked about). Agora. 18 November 2020. <https://agora.md/stiri/80250/maia-sandu-sa-intalnit-cu-ambasadorii-sua-si-ue-dar-si-cei-ai-romaniei-si-rusiei-despre-ce-au-discutat>

- Both the Republic of Moldova and the U.S. could work in their national interest and continue bilateral cooperation in the **security sector**. The newly elected President of Moldova, as chair of the country's National Security Council, which oversees the work of the security sector, could revitalize, and incentivize the cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the U.S. on several security sectors, as cybersecurity and intelligence cooperation.

The Republic of Moldova, although the constitutionally declared its neutrality in 1994, has developed efficient cooperation with the U.S. in the fields of the security sector, such as military-to-military relations, military exchanges, and military educational programs. The increase in defense spending and overcoming the position of the country with one of the lowest GDP spending share on defense (only 0.4 % of GDP in 2019)²² could expand the country's partnership potential and further security collaboration with the U.S. on already existing Foreign Military Financing (FMF/Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Excess Defense Articles (EDA) programs.

The Republic of Moldova could develop a more pro-active position and use the U.S. support and collaboration in the **conflict settlement process in the Transnistria region**. As part of the 5+2 format negotiations process on Transnistria, the U.S. has been a strong supporter of Moldova's territorial integrity and confidence-building between the two banks of river Nistru. It is in the Republic of Moldova's national interest to become more pro-active in inviting the members of the international community, including the U.S. to cooperate and participate in the conflict settlement.

The Republic of Moldova should also look at the possibilities to be a **stronger contributor to peace and stability, to advance from a consumer into a security provider in the region**. It would be useful for Moldova to deepen its security effort and collaboration with strategic partners in a common effort for international peace support mission under U.N. mandate.

- Deepening collaboration with the U.S. in the area of **democratic reforms, human rights and the rule of law** it is in the Moldovan's vital national interest. This new political cycle provides a possibility for Moldova to be more pro-active in implementing anti-corruption reforms, monitoring the justice reform sector, and respect for human rights. The Moldovan authorities hold a special responsibility to improve legislation, including through a closer dialogue involving representatives of political parties, business and NGOs, to establish a system of checks and balances capable of ensuring greater transparency of the decision-making process.
- It is in national interest of Moldova to initiate and attract U.S. support in promoting an independent media environment and **combating disinformation and manipulation**. Moldovan authorities should be aware of the concentration of media ownership and monopolization of the advertising market and work to make the professional, independent journalism sustainable, since only a healthy media landscape leads to the achievement of a democratic society. Moldovan governmental structures could work with civil society, independent media and international organization and create a healthy media environment. Moldova could become a regional center to counteract the Russian disinformation, neutralize the fake news campaigns and Russian propaganda.

²² Military expenditure by country as percentage of gross domestic product, 1988-2019. SIPRI 2020. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932019%20as%20a%20share%20of%20GDP.pdf>

- The Republic of Moldova, as a small state could adopt a strategy of “**small but smart**” country and use its smallness in its advantage and promote its national interest. It is in Moldova’s national interest to clearly **define its niche in economic development** and to elaborate a concrete plan in pursuing it. Moldova has the advantage of geopolitical proximity with the large Eurozone and of diaspora willing to return. By creating a rule-based economic environment by improving legislation regarding enterprises, banks and customs, and creating conditions for growth and employment, Moldova could boost foreign investment and trigger the partial return of the labor force. The potential to develop the IT sector, online services and consulting companies are some of the business opportunities for Moldova. Creating a non-corrupted economic and social environment could interest foreign investors and entrepreneurs, drew to the possibility to develop their business in Moldova. Continuing collaboration with World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) would deepen economic reform program support and help reform national economy.
- Another avenue for Moldova could represent the expansion of small business of **rural development**, which could be an authentic opportunity for growing family business, developing rural areas, and contributing to the preservation of green zones. It also has a real potential to contribute to the global environmental effort, and the opportunity of cooperation with other countries, including the U.S. The clear and well-defined environmental projects could not only win grants from the international organizations but also attract donations and contributions from private donors, philanthropists, and private investors, including from the U.S.
- Another opportunity for small country as Moldova, is to develop **rural tourism, wine testing** and **healthy eating** niche. Moldova, with world famous wineries, such as Cricova, Milestii Mici and Purcari, could become a tourist attraction. Moldovans are well known to be guest-welcome people, have rich culture and traditions, and developing small business, family business would suit this purpose. Tourists from around the world, including from the U.S., could be curious to discover new unexplored country, eat healthy food and get to know the culture and local traditions.
- As a small state, Moldova should elaborate and actively promote a national plan of **public diplomacy** between the United State and Moldova, as one of the most cost-effective and valuable foreign policy tools. Moldovan diplomatic work could be coupled with the effort of Moldovan diaspora in the United States, as well as the United States Government alumna in Moldova to promote people-to-people relations between Moldovan and American communities. The success of collaboration between Moldova and the United States depends not only on the governmental effort, but furthermore on the involvement of the private sector, non-governmental organizations, universities, and individual citizens.
- Moldova could also use its advantages for **education** opportunities. Moldova’s culture value education and should be combined with the reform of the educational system, to modernize the methods and the content of teaching subjects, to improve the quality of instruction, and to eradicate corruption and exam cheating at all levels of schooling. Moldova could propose a complex plan to reform education and to become a more attractive partner for the international exchange educational projects and **online education**, including the educational exchange with the U.S.

Conclusions

The elections of Joseph Biden and Maia Sandu as presidents of the United States and the Republic of Moldova represent a change in the political landscape in both countries and open a new possibility for cooperation between the two countries. The great power and a small state could benefit from reciprocal collaboration and advance the national interest gains in areas as security issue, democracy, good governance, and environment protection.

In both countries, the new elected democratic leaders are facing the difficulties of two-level politics, as they need to maneuver between the domestic political realities and foreign policy. In the U.S., after the violent incident in the American capital, and the complicated transitional period, Joseph Biden will face numerous challenges to unite the country, to work with members of both parties, and to pursue his reforms regarding foreign policy. Maia Sandu, as well, has the complicated task of mobilizing internal politics, eventually after the new parliamentary elections and establishing a democratic majority, to work together to implement her foreign agenda.

Regardless of the complex domestic political realities, there is clear that the political change in Washington and Chisinau presents a new political cycle with real potential for promoting the national interest of the U.S. and Moldova. Boosting on existing collaboration in the security issues, promotion of democracy, and anti-corruption reform, the U.S. is expected to continue monitoring the implementation of the allocated funds and resources, and providing stricter conditionality in fighting corruption, the justice reforms, and respect for human rights. The Moldova authorities should explicitly show political will and real commitment to promote democratic reform, implement anti-corruption measures, and prove that they are trustable partners in bilateral cooperation.

Abbreviations:

AA	Association Agreement
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
EDA	Excess Defense Articles
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PfP	Partnership for Peace
NC MD Partnership	North Carolina and the Republic of Moldova Partnership
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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About the Foreign Policy Association:

The Foreign Policy Association of Moldova (APE) is one of the main “think-tanks” in Moldova in the field of foreign policy. APE aims at supporting the Europeanization and European integration process of the Republic of Moldova, and Transnistrian settlement. APE was set up in the autumn of 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public figures and former officials and high-ranking diplomats who have thus decided to contribute through their expertise and experience to a comprehensive analysis of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova, as well as to formulation of an effective foreign policy.