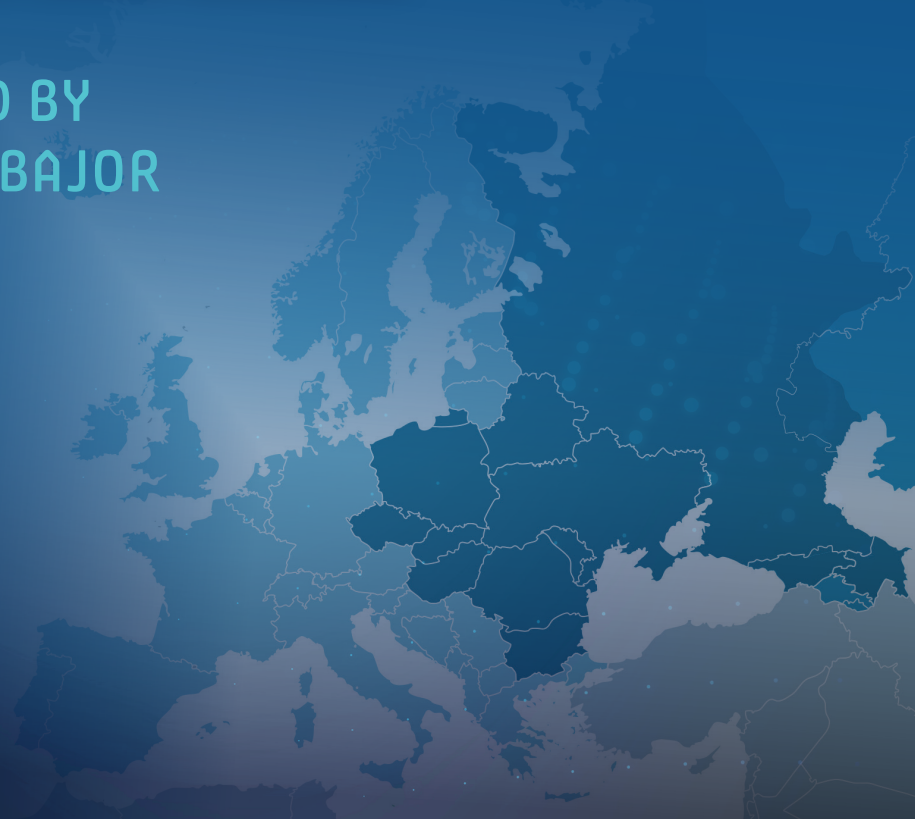


EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

The Role and Significance
in the Process
of Transformation
of the Countries
of Eastern Europe
and the South Caucasus

EDITED BY
PIOTR BAJOR



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of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus**

**edited by
PIOTR BAJOR**




Kraków

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Evolution of Relations Between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union in the Context of Eastern Partnership (2009–2021) Main Directions

ABSTRACT: The participation of the Republic of Moldova in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) platform has enabled Moldova to make significant progress in country's development over the past decade. The enhancing and deepening relationships with the EaP countries and the European Union (EU), along with the implementation of diverse programs and initiatives drawn up by the EU within the framework of the Eastern Neighborhood Policy has brought tangible results and benefits. The signing of the Association Agreement with the EU has become an important integral part of the constructive political dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the EU, which covers all cooperation areas in their interest. The creation of the DCFTA had a favorable impact on the increase in Moldovan exports to the EU countries, trade in services, competitiveness of Moldovan products, and it intensified trade and economic relations between the parties. The visa liberalization regime and the technical and financial support from the EU have created a number of advantages for the Republic Moldova and its citizens.

The development of relationships between the Republic of Moldova and the EU has been characterized by ups and downs – from the “success story” of the Eastern Partnership to a period of crisis and stagnation. The difficulties of cooperation were due to internal political crises, inconsistency of the government’s actions and a low level of democratic development coupled with a high level of corruption of Moldovan officials. The new stage of development has emerged with the coming to power in Moldova in 2020–2021 of pro-European forces. This new phase will be based on pragmatic dialogue and the acceleration of integration processes. The EU’s commitment to strengthening the political association and economic integration of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union continues to be a strong foundation for internal fundamental transformations, state development and modernization of the country.

KEYWORDS: European foreign policy vector, reforms, modernization, political associations, economic integration, common European aspirations, European future

Political dialogue

The political dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the EU is one of the most important conditions for the progressive interaction of the parties, laying the basis for political cooperation, maintaining security, socio-economic development, and promoting European values. The institutional framework of the political dialogue is stipulated in the Association Agreement with the EU,¹ replacing the already existing Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the EU.² This has contributed to the expansion of the political dialogue in all spheres of mutual interest, including the strengthening of democracy, political, economic and institutional stability, border security, as well as the promotion of cross-border cooperation and good neighborly relations.

¹ *Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part*, no. L 260/4, August 30, 2014. At: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830(01)&from=EN), last accessed November 30, 2021.

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, *Moldova–EU Relations*. At: <https://mfa.gov.md/en/content/moldova-eu-relations>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

The thorny path of Moldova towards the European model of development and deepening the relations with the EU

The Prague European Summit, held on 7 May, 2009, marked the beginning of the practical implementation of the Polish-Swedish initiative aimed at expanding the area of the eastern policy of the European Union. This was expressed in an ambitious new EU project, namely the Eastern Partnership (EaP),³ which initially seen as a framework policy, aimed at developing multilateral cooperation between partner countries to better advance them towards deeper relations with the EU, like what happened in the framework of the Visegrad Group. The project supposed the acceleration of the political and economic integration of states through the implementation of radical transformations and reforms, pursuing the goal of improving the well-being of the participant countries.

The Republic of Moldova, being traditionally in the zone of Russian influence, underwent difficult times. Relations with Russia worsened after Moldova's refusal to sign the "Kozak plan" for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in 2003.⁴ The economic levers of pressure and soft power resources used by Russia, as well as the ban on the import of Moldovan wine in 2006, had an extremely painful impact on the economic situation of the country.⁵ The instability of the socio-political development of the Republic of Moldova, poverty, low levels of income, mass unemployment, and the prospects for the development of the state provoked social discontent. It seemed that the acute permanent nature of social problems could be a powerful factor that would highlight the precariousness of the political situation in Moldova and the deepening economic difficulties.

The idea of the Eastern Partnership project was not warmly greeted by the Moldovan authorities, being considered to a greater extent in the geopolitical context.⁶ Nonetheless, understanding the importance of improving relations with the EU

³ European Council, *Eastern Partnership*. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

⁴ T. de Waal, N. von Twickel, *Beyond Frozen Conflict: Scenarios for Separatist Disputes of Eastern Europe*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International 2020. At: https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Frozen-Conflicts-_final.pdf, last accessed November 30, 2021.

⁵ D. Amonte, "Wine Warfare at the Doorstep – Nothing New, Just Business for Russia", *Moldova's Foreign Policy Statewatch*, no. 8 (2010). At: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/121707/IDIS_8.pdf, last accessed November 30, 2021.

⁶ К. Соломон, «Восточное партнерство» и европейская перспектива Республики Молдова. В: П. Байор (ред.) *Восточное партнерство: цели-опыт-вызовы*, Краков: Ксиенгарния Академицка 2013, (K. Solomon, «*Vostočnoe partnerstvo*» i evropejskaâ perspektiva Respubliki Moldova. In: P. Bajor (ed.), *Vostočnoe partnerstvo: celi-opyt-vyzovy*, Krakov: Księgarnia Akademicka 2013), pp. 172–173.

and advancing along the path of European integration in the current situation, they made a rational decision. The initiative was supported, and the Republic of Moldova, together with Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus, became a participant in this project.

The regress in the political and economic spheres led to the advent of the “Alliance for European Integration” in Moldova in September 2009, a coalition of national, liberal and liberal-democratic political forces united in opposition to the communists.⁷ Although the four-year period of the Alliance was characterized by a high level of conflict within the ruling coalition, profound changes took place in the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU. These changes marked the beginning of a real, practical level of interaction between the parties, which was a key difference as compared to the communist times. The cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership built positive dynamics, creating additional incentives for strengthening the political dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the EU.

From Moldova’s “success story” in the Eastern Partnership to discrediting and breaking trust

The new stage in the evolution of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU seemed to be very promising, yet no one expected Moldova to become the so-called “success story” of the Eastern Partnership countries. Simultaneously, the positive dynamics of cooperation became more and more obvious; meetings of the Moldovan leadership with the ruling elite of Western countries became more frequent, and the country got financial support from not only European partners but also the International Monetary Fund and some Western countries – the USA, Germany, and Romania.

The negotiations on the Association Agreement had a decisive role in the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU. The political dialogue included three levels of negotiations: conditions for signing the framework document of the Association Agreement; the creation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA); and liberalization of the visa regime. Interested in the execution of this

⁷ I. Groza, M. Jopp et al., *Assessing the State of European Integration and Potential for Transatlantic Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Space: The Case of Moldova*, IEP Research Paper No. 2 (2017), Berlin: Institut für Europäische Politik 2017. At: <http://iep-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Assessing-the-State-of-European-Integration-and-Potential-for-Transatlantic-Cooperation-The-Case-of-Moldova.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

Agreement with the EU, Moldova made significant progress in developing the capacity to prepare and implement reforms. The country used modern practices proposed by the EU, which gave rise to the application of innovative approaches to solving existing problems. The commitment of both sides to progress contributed to the dynamics of the technical negotiations on the Association Agreement. As a result, the negotiations were completed at all three levels in 2013. At the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius on 28–29 November, 2013, Moldova signed the text of the Association Agreement with the EU.

The Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit of 2013 split the life of Moldova into “before” and “after.” Since 28 April, 2014, Moldovan citizens with biometric passports have received the right to visa-free entry to the Schengen zone, and more than 1.4 million citizens used this right only in the period from April 2014 to April 2018. Moldova was the first state in the Eastern Partnership to fulfill all the criteria of the Action Plan for visa liberalization.⁸ The Republic of Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the EU in Brussels on 27 June, 2014, together with Ukraine and Georgia. The Parliament of Moldova ratified it on 2 July, 2014.⁹ The document officially entered into force on 1 January, 2016 after ratification by all EU member states. From the moment of political negotiations to the execution of the Association Agreement, the Republic of Moldova went through a difficult period of implementation of institutional reforms and legislative changes that brought Moldova closer to the institutional requirements and standards of the EU.

Despite the fact that Moldova managed to become a “success story” of the Eastern Partnership countries, it should be noted that, in many respects, this result was achieved thanks to the involvement of European officials in Moldovan politics. Internal political strife and conflicts undermined the value of the gained achievements. Foreign policy factor – the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU and DCFTA became a stabilizing factor for Moldovan politics. However, for this, the EU had to get involved in Moldova’s politics much more deeply than the European partners had counted on. During this and the following period, more than one example can be

⁸ V. Mosneaga, G. Mosneaga, “Visa-Free Regime of the Eastern Partnership Countries with the EU: Effects and Policies”, *Modoscopie*, vol. 2, no. 81 (2018), p. 108.

⁹ Parlamentul – Republica Moldova, *Закон № 112 от 02.07.2014 о ратификации Соглашения об ассоциации между Республикой Молдова, с одной стороны, и Европейским Союзом и Европейским сообществом по атомной энергии и их государствами-членами, с другой стороны (Закон № 112 от 02.07.2014 о ratifikacii Soglašeniâ ob asociacii meždu Respublikoj Moldova, s odnoje storony, i Evropejskim Soûzom i Evropejskim soobšestvom po atomnoj ènergii i ih gosudarstvami-členami, s drugoj storony)*. At: <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=353829>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

cited that domestic and foreign policy decisions were made in Moldova through the mediation and as a result of consultations with EU representatives, who have even called “mediators” of Moldovan politics.¹⁰ In fact, the permanent nature of internal political instability and the low level of development of democracy make it impossible to get along without the support of other foreign policy forces in critical situations.

Gradually advancing along the path of European integration, trying to turn the European model into a paradigmatic model of the country’s development, the political elite of Moldova promoted reforms. However, at the same time, insufficient attention was paid to social democracy based on the principles of freedom and independence, the rule of law and social cohesion, as well as their overall importance for the promotion of political activity. The European model of development is based on these postulates, and only they can become a solid foundation of functional democracy and effective governance. Fundamental political values and basic legal principles are discussed extremely responsibly, diligently and painstakingly in Europe, while it is common practice in Moldova to give a decorative character to democratic reforms, creating an illusory effect regarding certain achievements in the reform process in Moldova.¹¹ As a result, the country becomes hostage to the illusions of its own power structures, guided by its own interests and momentary benefits.

The positive dynamics of the evolution of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU, as well as the history of Moldova’s success in the Eastern Partnership, were quickly replaced by radically different characteristics. The corruption of the highest echelons of power and the withdrawal of a billion dollars from the banking system of the Republic of Moldova created an unprecedented situation and caused significant damage to the economic and political stability of the state. This led to the undermining of the confidence of the European partners. It had a negative impact on the popularity of the European foreign policy vector of the country’s development and served as an impetus for an even greater delimitation of the Moldovan society along the East-West principle.

¹⁰ *Восточное партнерство до и после Вильнюса*, Москва 2014 (*Vostočnoe partnerstvo do i posle Vil'nŭsa*, Moskva 2014). At: <http://www.instituteofeurope.ru/images/uploads/doklad/301.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹¹ В. Сака, *Тенденции и проблемы консолидации демократии в Республике Молдова в контексте политики европейской интеграции*. В: П. Байор (ред.), *Детерминанты и перспективы политики Европейской интеграции Республики Молдова*, Краков: Ксиенгарния Академицка 2015, (V. Saka, *Tendencii i problemy konsolidacii demokratii v Respublike Moldova v kontekste politiki evropejskoj integracii*. In: P. Bajor (ed.), *Determinanty i perspektyvy politiki Evropejskoj integracii Respubliki Moldova*, Krakov: Księgarnia Akademicka 2015), pp. 80–81.

During 2015–2016 relations between the EU and the Republic of Moldova became significantly complicated. The political crisis generated by corruption scandals and political strife became a key characteristic of this period. He highlighted the fragility of state institutions and the superficiality of the ongoing democratic reforms. Within one year Moldova turned from a “success story” of the Eastern Partnership into a “captive state.” As a result, the EU froze the EU financial assistance. Moldova needed to build a political dialogue in a new format and restore the lost level of confidence in European structures.

The EU insisted on promoting a targeted policy to solve the problems it was facing and focus efforts on the implementation of the Association Agreement and Moldova’s fulfillment of its obligations. In search of a way out of this situation, the Government of Moldova had to develop a so-called roadmap of priority reforms and necessary measures for their implementation. The presidential elections of 2016 were not far away, though the Moldovan roadmap had only been partially implemented, and the EU decided to unfreeze financial aid, allocating € 45.3 million to support four-sector budget programs in December 2016.¹²

The victory of the pro-Russian president in the elections of 2016 could not but cause concern for European partners. After his statements about the need to annul the Association Agreement with the EU¹³ and the importance of focusing efforts on building a strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, it was clear that the European vector of Moldovan development would be another decoration. This further redoubled the mistrust of the EU representatives. In fact, throughout the pro-Russian president’s tenure, the EU built political dialogue at the level of the Moldovan government.

In an attempt to prove its commitment to the European Integration Agenda, the government developed and adopted a new National Action Plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement for the period 2017–2019.¹⁴ The document reflects a map of priorities and measures of power structures aimed at fulfilling the

¹² J. Lovitt (ed. in chief), *Eastern Partnership Index 2015–2016. Charting Progress in European Integration, Democratic Reforms, and Sustainable Development*, Bruxelles: Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2017. At: <https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/index-2015-6-web.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹³ “Moldovan President Wants Association Agreement with EU Annulled”, *Agence Europe*, January 17, 2017. At: <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/11705/26>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹⁴ Government of Republic of Moldova, *Cabinet Approved National Action Plan to Implement Moldova-EU Association Agreement in 2017–2019*, December 28, 2016. At: <https://gov.md/en/content/cabinet-approved-national-action-plan-implement-moldova-eu-association-agreement-2017-2019>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

obligations to carry out reforms, harmonizing the legal framework in accordance with EU standards and promoting the European foreign policy vector of development.

Also, the EU and Moldova have developed a draft of a new agenda for the implementation of the Association Agreement for 2017–2020. Overall, the dialogue between the EU and the Moldovan government started to stabilize step by step. The critical rhetoric of the EU towards the Moldovan authorities gradually changed to a pragmatic tone. The importance of using the available levers of influence to achieve political and economic stability of the state, to preserve the European vector of development, turned out to be much more significant for the EU than any radical measures to curtail programs and projects. The rationality of the EU approaches is focused on achieving concrete results.

However, the internal crossroads of Moldova's development remained concealed from the European partners. The actual concentration of all power in the hands of V. Plahotniuc, the leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova, who controlled and modeled the entire political space of the country and imitated achievements on the way of implementing reforms, required the immediate possibility of creating conditions for the start of dismantling the oligarchic system.

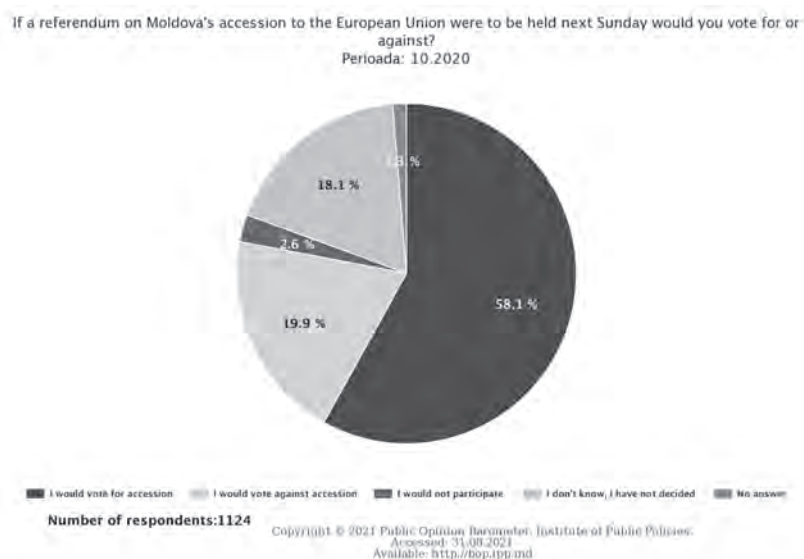
The ruling structures of Moldova reached a compromise, building a temporary coalition that united the forces of the pro-Russian Socialist Party and the pro-European bloc ACUM. The formed government, headed by M. Sandu, declared its determination to de-oligarchization and reorganization of the state administration system. In response, V. Plahotniuc passed a decision to remove I. Dodon from his post through the Constitutional Court of the Republic and called into question the legitimacy of the Government of M. Sandu. In this situation, external forces intervened again. For the first time in the history of Moldova, three external political actors – the EU, the US and Russia – unanimously expressed support for the legitimate pro-European Government of M. Sandu. In fact, these three forces played a decisive role in overcoming the acute internal political crisis in Moldova and overthrowing the oligarchic regime.

The conflicts between political rivals in the provisional coalition intensified, and the decision of the Parliament of November 12, 2019 on the resignation of the pro-European Government was the climax of the confrontation. Although M. Sandu was criticized for the modest results of her short premiership, it was thanks to her efforts and reputation of a reformer politician with liberal views that relations between Moldova and the EU were somewhat smoothed out.

The positive perception of the European vector of development by the citizens of Moldova significantly increased over the years of the existence of the Eastern Partnership, which is mainly the result of effective public diplomacy and the EU's "soft

power.” And though Moldova still continues to be viewed in the geopolitical context between East and West,¹⁵ most of the country’s population supports the European civilizational choice of the state. According to the Public Opinion Barometer (2020), 58.1% of respondents were in favor of future of Moldova in the EU (See Chart 1).¹⁶

Chart 1. Republic of Moldova Public Opinion Barometer



Breakthrough towards the European future of Moldova

With the advent of the pro-European President M. Sandu at the end of 2020 and the formation of a pro-European majority in the Parliament, not only a new stage in the political dialogue between Moldova and the EU, but also a new political cycle of the democratic development of Moldova came about. The victory of pro-European

¹⁵ В. Цуркан, В. Мошняга, *Республика Молдова на перепутье Европейский Союз VS Таможенный Союз*. В: П. Байор (ред.), *Восточное партнерство: цели-опыт-вызовы*, Краков: Ксиенгарния Академицка 2013 (V. Curkan, V. Mosneaga, *Respublika Moldova na pereput'e Evropejskij Soúz vs Tamožennyj Soúz*. In: P. Bajor (ed.), *Vostočnoe partnerstvo: celi-opyt-vyzovy*, Krakov: Księgarnia Akademicka 2013), pp. 192–193.

¹⁶ Republic of Moldova Public Opinion Barometer. At: <http://bop.ipp.md/en>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

forces is called an “electoral revolution,” which highlighted the turn of public opinion towards pro-European forces, which became possible mainly due to the established image of M. Sandu as an honest and incorruptible president. In addition, the presented pre-election programs of the pro-European forces were distinguished by a deep social orientation, which was an additional incentive in the conditions of the population’s deep social dissatisfaction with the current political and socio-economic situation.

Rules of procedure of the relations between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries continue to be carried out on the basis of the EU Global Strategy¹⁷ and the updated European Neighborhood Policy.¹⁸ At the same time, the rapidly changing dynamics of regional security in the Eastern Partnership area have highlighted the obvious need to rearrange this format. Taking into account the commitment and interest of the three leading Eastern Partnership countries, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, in promoting the European vector of development, the EU developed a very ambitious plan for political and economic integration within the framework of the implementation of the “Trio Strategy 2030 for the future Eastern Partnership.”¹⁹ Not only the expectations of partner countries are important for the UE, but also the initiative and readiness for integration processes, which is not observed in the three states not included in the so-called “success story.” In addition, the situation in these countries has recently been aggravated by internal political difficulties and contradictions. The consequences of the Armenian–Azerbaijani war, the Russian military presence in Armenia, and Moscow’s support for the authoritarian regime of President of Belarus Aleksander Lukashenko and his declarations to withdraw from the Eastern Partnership – all this left its impact on the revision of the EU’s policy towards these countries. The so-called “dividing line” between states interested in political association and integration and those who prefer preserving the current state of affairs within the framework of the Eastern Partnership led to the fact that Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova signed a memorandum on founding the Association Trio.

In this context, it seems important to clarify that European integration is multidimensional in its essential characteristics. It involves the convergence of legal norms, an increase in the volume of trade and economic cooperation, the growth of

¹⁷ European Union External Action Service, *A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, December 15, 2019. At: https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy/17304/global-strategy-european-unions-foreign-and-security-policy_en, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹⁸ European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations*. At: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/index_en, last accessed November 30, 2021.

¹⁹ TS-LKD, *Trio Strategy 2030*, October 2019. At: <https://tsajunga.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/LT-EPP-Trio-Strategy-2030.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

transnational networks that unite society, the development of human potential and capital, and as contacts between people. Such a broad concept of integration supposes that EU membership or association with the EU can be not only goals and stages, but also the final state of the integration process. However, integration is not only limited to a normative approach, nor does it serve solely as a measure of harmonization with EU standards, but it also reflects actual social, economic and political transformations. Within the framework of this kind of measurements, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus are at the same stage, while Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova have taken a notable step forward, which allowed them to move to the next stage of integration processes. The new format of cooperation on integration into the EU is capable of accelerating the integration of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, provided that the states manage to overcome internal political contradictions and crises, carry out reforms in a decent way, and fulfill the basic requirements and obligations assumed. This will provide a platform for holistic integration into the EU.

Cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the EU in the field of security

Cooperation in the field of security is an important direction in the evolution of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU in the context of the Eastern Partnership. Security has been one of the most significant components in this project from the very beginning of its launch, with a focus on border management and prevention of illegal migration and crime. The context of regional security was rapidly changing, new challenges have emerged and the old ones have intensified with a common denominator for all countries in the region. From a geographical point of view, the Eastern Partnership is a heterogeneous contact zone which largely determines the nature of conflicts rooted in the region. Frozen and armed conflicts the strengthening of militaristic sentiments continue to hinder the development of the region and impair the security of the Eastern Partnership countries. The lack of clarity regarding the plans and the subsequent actions of Russia significantly destabilizes the situation, deepens the turbulent situation and creates unfounded grounds for fears about the growth of hotbeds of conflict. Under these circumstances, there is a need for synergy in the actions of the countries in the region, as well as support from the West in opposing the Russian policies.

The armed confrontation in the Eastern Ukraine has become a background factor hindering any process of world formation and regulation in the region. This is in the interests of Russia, as it does its best to maintain its traditional influence here. The local conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Transnistrian region provide Russia with additional advantages of control and influence over the course of events. The escalation of the conflict in Donbass and tensions in the Eastern Ukraine have an impact on the dynamics of these conflicts and postpone the process of settlement, de-occupation of territories and the withdrawal of Russian troops. This is a key obstacle to ensuring security and stability on the eastern borders of the EU.

Mobilization of joint efforts of the states of the region, aimed at maintaining peace, security and stability, is a priority under the current conditions. Deepening cooperation in the field of security and defense should be based on the synchronization of joint actions in matters of operational-strategic interaction and response.

Achievements of Moldova in fulfilling the tasks of maintaining security within the framework of the Eastern Partnership

In recent years, the Republic of Moldova has significantly expanded its participation in various structures and initiatives in the field of national and regional security. In 2014, consultations were launched between Moldova and the EU on its participation in the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Promoting regional security and sub-regional security efforts to foster international stability, including cooperation and participation in CSDP missions, is a priority for Moldova. Since 2019, the possibilities and conditions of Moldova's participation in the EC PESCO defense union, which is considered one of the new instruments of European integration, have been under consideration.

The aspiration of integration into the European security space required revision of the national legislative framework and the provision of synergy with neighboring states and participant countries of the Eastern Partnership in this matter. In particular, this concerns the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova, the National Defense Strategy and the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Defense Strategy for the period 2018–2020, the Military Strategy and Action Plan for its implementation until 2022. Particular attention in the framework of the Eastern Partnership is paid to combating hybrid threats, disinformation, fake news and propaganda. The newly created East StratCom Task Force was a conduit for EU strategic communica-

tions in the Eastern Neighborhood, the efforts of which were aimed at countering the ongoing disinformation campaign on the part of Russia.²⁰ Priority measures in the field of strategic communications are focused on strengthening the media and space of the countries of the region, supporting freedom of the media and independent media, and improving mechanisms for responding to disinformation from external actors. New security threats, in particular the growth of cybercrime, cyberattacks, and an increase in technological risks, pushed the Moldovan authorities to develop and implement the National Cybersecurity Program for the period 2016–2020.²¹

The complexities of the reform in the security sector in the Republic of Moldova were accompanied by a lack of a holistic vision for the implementation of integrative approaches, an insufficient level of development of technical capabilities, a weak resource potential and the vulnerability of critical infrastructure to security challenges and threats. The rapidly developing digitalization and the emergence of new information and technical capabilities have caused additional inconvenience to Moldova to adapt to new realities and protect the national security of the state. The current pro-European authorities within the framework of the Government's Action Plan for 2021–2022 will continue the initiated reforms and modernization of the security sector. Within the framework of the new agenda, it is important to move away from the failures of previous years and focus on the progressive modernization of security structures and increasing the level of resilience to modern challenges and threats. The need to maintain the stability and security of the EU's eastern neighbors is still a priority direction of interaction between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries.

Trade and economic relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU

Trade and economic relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU has come to be one of the key positions in the entire system of foreign economic relations of the country. In recent years, the total foreign trade turnover has significantly increased between the parties. The role of cooperation in the fields of economy, energy and

²⁰ Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *Recommendations by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) on Combating Disinformation and Propaganda*, 2017. At: https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/EaP-CSF-Recommendations_February-2017.pdf, last accessed November 30, 2021.

²¹ National Cyber Security Program of the Republic of Moldova for the Years 2016–2020. At: https://mei.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_evaluare_hg_811_2015_-_07.06.2021.pdf, last accessed November 30, 2021.

investment cooperation has grown significantly. The EU is Moldova's main trading partner, with 70% of exports and almost 50% of imports. Romania, Italy, Germany and Poland are among the leading EU member states to which Moldovan goods are exported. Over the past 10 years, the volume of Moldovan exports to the EU countries has grown remarkably (Table 1).

Table 1. The dynamics of trade turnover between the Republic of Moldova and the EU (2009–2021)

Year	Export Mln US dollars	Import Mln US dollars
2009	678.5	1422.5
2010	746.5	1704.2
2011	1087.0	2256.6
2012	1013.4	2318.7
2013	1140.9	2472.8
2014	1246.0	2567.7
2015	1217.6	1954.1
2016	1332.4	1973.7
2017	1596.9	2389.1
2018	1862.1	2851.7
2019	1830.5	2889.9
2020	1640.3	2470.7

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. At: <https://statistica.gov.md/category.php?l=en&cidc=336&>.

The DCFTA, being a tool that stimulates and creates the necessary conditions for the growth of Moldovan exports to EU countries, has had, among other things, a positive impact on improving the quality of Moldovan products. The application of standards helps increase the competitiveness and diversification of the products and goods supplied to the EU markets. According to the Eastern Partnership Index, which reflects the progress achieved by six countries in the integration with the EU, the increase in the share of EU countries in Moldovan exports to 70% has been one of the main practical successes of Moldova over the years of the Eastern Partnership.²²

The main problems in the trade and economic cooperation of the parties continue to be the presence of certain barriers that do not allow increasing the volume of exports,

²² European Council, *Индекс Восточного Партнерства 2015–2016*, April 17, 2020. At: <https://eap-csf.eu/23573-2-rus/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

the small variety of Moldovan goods exported to the EU, slow introduction of tariff quotas for some types of products and the low technological level of development of the agricultural and textile sectors.

The economic development of the Eastern Partnership countries was also assisted by the programs of cross-border cooperation, which acted as tools for the development of border territories and strengthening the economic interaction of the states of the region. The main attention was focused on the life activities of the population and overcoming barriers that hinder the development of cross-border interaction. It helped the implementation of infrastructure and logistics projects and direction of the participation of a larger number of entrepreneurs and public organizations towards the problems of border areas, and it opened up new opportunities for developing skills in joint planning of cross-border cooperation.

In July 2021, the EU announced a new economic and investment plan for the Eastern Partnership, developed in line with the five long-term policy goals of the Eastern Partnership until 2025.²³ The plan aims at stimulating economic growth, increasing the number of jobs and expanding trade. To provide economic support and the implementation of the tasks set, blended financing, grants and public-private investments are envisaged. Particular attention will be paid to the socio-economic recovery of the participating countries after the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that the EU is the largest donor of financial resources and technical assistance for sustainable development, modernization, as well as improvements in the welfare of the state and the population of the Republic of Moldova.²⁴ Most of the financial and technical assistance programs are managed by the European Commission Directorate General for European Neighborhood Policy and are aimed at supporting reforms, socio-economic education and democratic consolidation.

The EU has significantly increased the resource provision of the Eastern Partnership countries in recent years. The instruments and indicators for the distribution of this resource provision, in particular, credit, grant support and humanitarian work, have largely depended on the nature of the EU's relations with the target country.

²³ EU Neighbours, *Eastern Partnership: A Renewed Agenda for Recovery, Resilience and Reform Underpinned by an Economic and Investment Plan*, July 2, 2021. At: <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/news/eastern-partnership-renewed-agenda-recovery-resilience-and-reform>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

²⁴ I. Tabirta, *The Western Development Vector of the Republic of Moldova (Between 2009–2019). The Relationship with the EU and Romania*. In: *Policy Brief About the Foreign Policy Evolution of the Republic of Moldova During the Period of 2009–2019*, Chisinau: APE 2019, p. 13.

The overall contribution of the EU to the development of the resource potential of the countries of the region, and their economic stability and attractiveness has made it possible to accelerate the transformation processes in the region and strengthened the interaction among the member states of the Eastern Partnership.

EU assistance to energy sector reforms

Energy security is a determining factor in ensuring the stability of the region, political and economic stability, as well as independence. Energy issues are, first of all, issues of global politics, where the interests of the Russian Federation and the EU intersect. Given the intention of Moldova to reduce its level of energy dependence on Russia, as well as the desire to take in and fully understand European markets, the cooperation between Moldova and the EU in the energy sector becomes especially relevant and requires a set of measures aimed at ensuring the energy security of Moldova and the Eastern Partnership states.

Today, the dominant trend in European energy cooperation is the implementation of the Third Energy Package, which presupposes specific principles for the functioning of the internal gas and electricity market in the EU. Currently, measures are being taken to split the vertically-integrated enterprise Moldovagaz, which does not meet the requirements of the Third Energy Package, as it owns a gas pipeline used for gas transportation and gas distribution networks, and is also engaged in trade. Unbundling is fraught with a number of difficulties because the main shareholder of Moldovagaz, the Russian company Gazprom, is not making the necessary efforts to complete this process. Meanwhile, it is necessary for the formation of the market, since Gazprom is the owner of the gas pipeline and an integrated-vertical enterprise, so it can cause problems for other economic agents wishing to supply gas to the Moldovan market.

The EU helps Moldova carry out reforms in the energy sector. The value of EU investments in the energy sector for the period of 2009–2018 was 78.8 million lei.²⁵ Currently, the primary tasks in the energy sector are: development of infrastructure and provision of the state with electricity transmission; rules of procedure of market rules, including existing technical and economic problems; the search for opportunities to ensure equal conditions for competition.

²⁵ EU for Moldova, *The Platform of EU-Funded Technical Assistance Projects in the Republic of Moldova*. At: www.eu4moldova.md/ro, last accessed November 30, 2021.

Cooperation in the field of culture and education within the framework of European integration, and the promotion of European values

European integration, being a non-hierarchical network process, presupposes the involvement of civil society, non-governmental organizations, public associations, and business structures in the political life of the state. This approach explains the thoroughness of the EU when dealing with the issues of development of the socio-cultural sphere, civil society, youth, and education in the countries of the Eastern Partnership.

Various EU programs were introduced during the realization of this format of cooperation which have contributed to the development of these areas, and are aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the region and the welfare of the citizens of the participant countries. The EU funded a number of socio-economic, cultural and educational projects for the Eastern Partnership countries,²⁶ such as the Erasmus + program, which brings together seven EU programs in the field of education, training, youth and sports for the period 2014–2020; Horizon 2020; EU4Youth; Regional Mechanism for Supporting Civil Society of the Eastern Partnership Countries; Creative Europe and others. Particular attention was paid to encouraging youth participation in the life of the state and society. All this has allowed an increase in the level of civic activism in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and strengthened the involvement of the population in socio-political processes.

The EU views common European values as a key element in the process of deepening political and economic integration. Building a common European future for the Eastern Partnership countries presupposes the development of the principles of democracy, supremacy, strict observance of human rights, the fight against discrimination and various forms of its manifestation. It is one of the fundamental foundations of the progressive advance towards building a common European future for the countries of the region.

Summary and recommendations

Thus, the main directions of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU in the context of the Eastern Partnership have significantly expanded and deepened.

²⁶ EU Neighbours, *East*. At: <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/region/25/eu-in-action/projects/Ongoing?page=1>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

The rationality and pragmatism characteristic of the EU's approaches to building a political dialogue with the Republic of Moldova were the key to the constructive dynamics of the relations. Though there are some unresolved problems, it was possible to achieve clarity and definiteness of the foreign policy vector of the development of Moldova. Regional solidarity became a determining factor uniting the countries of the "Associated Trio" in maintaining security and combating new challenges and threats. The level of trade and economic cooperation has increased, which has opened up new opportunities for developing European markets, improving the quality of products and the level of competitiveness of the associated countries of the Eastern Partnership. Cooperation among the parties in the energy sector has deepened, and actions have been intensified to ensure energy security by diversifying sources and reducing dependence on one supplier. Cooperation in the fields of culture, science and education has expanded. For the subsequent constructive and pragmatic development of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union in the context of the Eastern Partnership, it is important to highlight the following recommendations:

- The political dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the EU should be more focused on strengthening the control mechanisms for carrying out domestic reforms, as well as on the effectiveness of the political course and security policy, built on the principle of achieving practical results in ensuring and maintaining security on the European continent.
- On the eve of the Eastern Partnership Summit of 2021, the countries of the "Associated Trio" should decide on a list of joint efforts of states aimed at the practical implementation of ambitious, long-term and motivating goals outlined within the given format of cooperation and those initiatives that were sent by representatives of these states to harmonization in the EU. In particular, this is related to the participation of these states in the framework of EDF and PESCO.
- More attention should be paid to the development of a stable and integrated economy, overcoming existing barriers that prevent more complete integration of Moldovan products into the European market, as well as expanding its diversity and proper distribution of tariff quotas for certain types of products. It is necessary to build an infrastructure with appropriate technological capabilities which will expand the list of food products exported to the EU. The issues of regulation of the financial sector, monetary-credit and exchange rate policies remain sensitive. Special attention should be paid to the development and strengthening of economic interaction among the states of the Eastern Partnership.

- The issue of reducing the level of Moldova's energy dependence on the Russian Federation continues to be acute. Reforming the energy sector in line with EU standards is being carried out extremely slowly. It seems necessary to complete the unbundling process, coordinate positions on the cost and tariffs for gas transportation and complete the construction of new lines in order to provide the country with alternative energy sources.
- The coordination of regional cooperation mechanisms should be worked out in detail, taking into account the different levels of progress in political transformations and the appropriate level of functioning of democratic institutions. It is important to develop new approaches to cross-border cooperation and more intensive development of border areas.
- In the context of the growing digital transformation, which has become one of the trends in the current stage of world development, the experience and practice of the EU in the process of modernizing the digital infrastructure and strengthening its functioning, protection and sustainability is extremely important.
- In the context of promoting European aspirations and values, it is important to expand forums and formats for dialogue with civil society and youth, joint educational projects, scientific and technical cooperation and attracting more young researchers to joint programs and projects within the framework of the Eastern Partnership.

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The publication contains a collection of articles devoted to the most important aspects related to the process of transformation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus under the Eastern Partnership program. The book covers the results of a research project by an international team of scientists who present their findings on the policy of European integration, the role and importance of the Eastern Partnership in the process of change, and give recommendations for its implementation and activities in the future.



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