EU-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP AT THE CURRENT STAGE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Andreea RABOVILĂ,

studentă, anul III, facultatea Relații Internaționale, Științe Politice și Administrative, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova

CZU: 327(1-4/-6:470):323(478) E-mail: andreea.rabovila25@gmail.com

Articolul analizează relațiile UE-Rusia la etapa actuală prin identificarea principalelor componente care afectează interacționarea marilor puteri în faza curentă. Autorul cercetează subiectul prin prisma studierii evoluției relațiilor dintre UE și Federația Rusă, influenței marcate în vecinătatea comună, determinării tensiunilor și crizelor generate, modalității de depășire a acestora și perspectivelor de viitor în baza cazului Republicii Moldova.

EU-Russia relationship has emerged as an important topic, currently influencing not only the regional, but also the international arena by reshaping the geopolitical landscape across the continent and beyond. This is demonstrated considering its relevance, as EU-Russia relations sit at the intersection of political, economic and security interests that have a far-reaching impact on everything from global security and energy stability to economic interdependence. The purpose of the research was developed based on the theme's relevance and degree of investigation, involving analysing the EU-Russia relationship at the current stage and its impact on the Republic of Moldova by using the investigations of the shifts and tensions due to the evolution of the partnership, the evaluation of the impact of Ukrainian crisis in terms of EU's response and the establishment of the main interests and strategies in common neighbourhood.

Thus, the historiography research outlined the valuable contribution of the both, foreign scholars such as Tolstrup Janne, Barbara Roggeveen, Busygina Irina, Makarychev Andrey, Hoffmann Theodor, Romanova Tetyana, Sergey Karaganov, Chifu Iulian, Dungaciu Dan, and the scholars of Moldova State University, like Cebotari Svetlana, Grigore Vasilescu, Cristina Morari etc. The research increases the understanding of the actions of the political actors as Tolstrup J. mentions that „the international dimension simply turned more visible to the naked eye" making reference that at the same time as the two powers found common ground it made place for them in starting a competition in determining a geopolitical competition based on tensions, the urge for the autocratization of the post-soviet countries and simply on intensifying their efforts for dominance [1, p.12-13]. Morely, the historiography reveals that what began as a strategic partnership gradually devolved into ideological and geopolitical

confrontation, particularly intensified by EU enlargement, energy dependency and value-based contradictions.

The EU-Russia relationship should be carefully analysed taking into consideration the historical evolution, strategic turning points and current tensions, with a particular focus on the Ukrainian crisis and the shifting of the balance of power. The course of EU–Russia relations since the past thirty years provides an insightful lesson about geopolitical divergence. Early post–Cold War optimism for a „greater Europe”, where Russia and the EU would move toward interdependence based on shared political and economic values proved ultimately to be unsustainable. As the EU slowly enlarged both its institutional and territorial dimensions, it was obvious that its normative expansion, especially in the Eastern neighbourhood, would be sure to be tension-causing with an autarkic Russian Federation bent on preserving its sphere of influence [2, p.16]. These two competing logics of integration Moscow's statist realism and Brussels' liberal institutionalism have been at the heart of many of the resulting crises. Moreover, the absence of a shared long-term strategic framework has led to a vacuum filled by reactive policies, mutual suspicion, and diverging threat perceptions. Russia's shift towards Asia and closer alignment with China and the EU's growing alignment with NATO and Indo-Pacific democracies constitute a fragmentation of the post–Cold War international order along competing blocs. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a decisive break in the relationship. It not only shattered the already fragile security architecture of Europe but also entrenched an adversarial dynamic that is unlikely to be reversed in the near term. The EU's collective response marked by unprecedented unity, military aid, and long-term strategic recalibration signals a fundamental reorientation of its policy towards Russia, from engagement to deterrence.

As for the 2025, a set of statements and initiatives concerning Europe and Russia relations are issued by the EU officials: „Readiness 2030” which seeks to mobilize up to €800 billion to strengthen Europe's defence infrastructure in response to geopolitical threats [3]; the 18th package of sanctions for Russia, focusing on elements like the shadow fleet; the EUMAM Ukraine mission which offers military aid and trainings for Ukrainian soldiers; establishment of the maritime security hub in the Black Sea to ensure surveillance and safety in the region.

In this context, the impact of the EU-Russian relationship on the common neighbourhood is relevant, especially through the lens of the practical initiatives and strategies for the foreign policy, security, and internal development from the part of the rivalry of the two powers. The partnership between the two powers has manifested a divergence into scopes: the EU pursuing greater integration and democratization through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Eastern Partnership (EaP); Russia wanting to maintain its traditional sphere of influence, through economic pressure, military intervention, or soft power tools. This competition of strategies has intensified after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, exposing further polarizing pro-Russian and pro-European blocs in the common neighbourhood. The tensions

are illustrated by the case of the Republic of Moldova integrating with the EU as it is repeatedly exposed to Russian involvement by factors such as Russian influence through propaganda, historical ties, and manipulation via gas supply; influence on minority groups preferring the Russian language, intensified by pro-Russian media content; complex political events, economic conditions, all of them influencing the public opinion towards the European integration benefits [4, p.12-27]. Nevertheless, in 2023, Chișinău significantly increased its alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), reaching a cumulative alignment rate of 89.2 percent, up from 64.2 percent in 2022 [5]. For instance, Moldova now ranks 28th out of 180 countries on the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) index, a remarkable improvement of 63 positions since 2020 [6]. Similarly, in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, Moldova ranks 76th out of 180 countries, a notable improvement of 39 positions since 2020 [7]. Additionally, in the Global Gender Gap Report, Moldova currently occupies the 19th position out of 146 countries [8]. As a result, the Government approved the National Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova's Accession to the European Union for the years 2024-2027 and has extended the mandate of the European Union Partnership Mission in Moldova (EUPM) until 2027, both contributing to the perception of EU as a vital step towards the country's future.

In conclusion we can affirm that the research identified the evolution of the EU-Russian relations at the current stage, how the rivalry and competitions affect the international arena as well as the internal or external affairs of the common neighbourhood states, more specifically the Republic of Moldova which reach a European path. When it comes to EU-Russia relations, then, the old framework is not just obsolete, it may even prove harmful, as it risks provoking new clashes. Unless there is a fundamental change in Russia's domestic and foreign policy behaviour, the European Union is unlikely to return to the model of engagement that defined the post-Cold War era.

In order to overcome this phenomenon in the Republic of Moldova we can recommend for the republic to position itself as a mediator in broader EU-Russia discussions to safeguard national interests and adopt a neutral diplomatic role; to create alongside with EU a dedicated policy track to stabilize Moldova without provoking excessive Russian backlash. At the same time European Union must reduce internal splits among member states on how to interact with Russia; create a policy aimed to contain destabilizing Russian moves and make room for selective, pragmatic cooperation in areas of mutual interest (arms control, climate change or crisis management).

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Recomandat
***Cristina MORARI,** dr., lector universitar*