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THE IDENTITY APPROACH TO SOCIAL COHESION AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF NATIONAL INTEREST

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Abstract

National interest is the direction of domestic and foreign policies of a state. It is measured by the level of security and well-being of the state and its citizens, and in democratic states, it is indicated by the requirements of all stakeholders of national interest. The formation of a national interest follows the following scheme: Interest > Necessity > Awareness > Action. At present, the Republic of Moldova is between the necessity and awareness of national interest, as society is highly divided and there is no primary national interest with a general consensus. Even statehood or sovereignty are not a national interest with absolute support. This paper demonstrates the dynamics of national interest and the necessity of addressing the identity issue for social cohesion and achieving broad consensus regarding the national interest of the Republic of Moldova

Keywords: *national interest, social cohesion, democracy, international relations*

Introduction

The national interest of the Republic of Moldova is closely linked to its foreign policy, as it is a small state with limited regional and global influence to promote its interests. Hans Morgenthau established a realist tradition in the study of this concept, which can be summarized as follows: the national interests of foreign policy are hierarchically divided into two levels - primary and secondary (Morgenthau, 2005:80). According to this tradition, the first level is determined by the geopolitical position of the state and ensures its political and economic independence, security, and integrity as a social, economic, and political community, both nationally, historically, and culturally. These interests are supported through diplomatic missions, political, military, economic, and ideological means. The second level includes the state's interests in maintaining the stability of the international relations system and international security, including conflict management, as well as participation in processes of economic, environmental, cultural, and scientific cooperation, with an increasing autonomy in determining certain foreign policy actions of the state.

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According to the realist theory of national interests, the state's main interests remain unchanged over time, regardless of the nature of political regimes or political elites. Changes in circumstances may influence the state's foreign policy activities regarding the ways of supporting, manifesting, or implementing these interests, as well as the content of the sector, but the interests in ensuring territorial integrity, independence, and security are always prioritized. In contrast to primary interests, secondary interests are characterized by flexibility and transformation, being more easily influenced by constantly changing internal and external conditions, providing more opportunities for compromises.

An alternative position is promoted by the supporters of "subjectivist" approach, such as R. Snyuder, E. Furnes, N. Forward and others (Köchler,2015:84). In their vision, the national interest is viewed as a phenomenon that mostly reflects the interests of the ruling political entities rather than the interests of the whole nation or state. Such a position, however, represents a significant importance by introducing the understanding on how the national interests may be promoted by the authorities.

The opposite position, however, is shared by the supporters of liberal theory that significantly diminishes the role of national interest in the international environment based on cooperation, collective security and interdependence between states. Thus, being the promoters of these principles, liberals put common interests above the national ones. Focusing on the process of building a globalized interdependent world, liberals prefer to prioritize regional or global interests rather than focus on the particular interests that are relevant just for one actor. In their vision, such an approach offers the possibility to cooperate rather than constantly compete with each other. Generally speaking, liberal view regarding the common interest may be interpreted as the totality of national interests shared by certain group of states.

Therefore, even being viewed differently by various scholars of different theoretical schools, the concept of national interest still remains relevant and significant in the modern international reality. The historical overview on how the national interest has been formed and promoted in different international systems also offers us the understanding of the changing and flexible essence of this concept. In this regard, the author views national interest as the totality of social and state needs that determine the main purposes and goals of the country in its foreign and domestic policy. These interests are usually defined through such terms like geographical and geopolitical position of the country, its economic development, and the historical, social, and cultural character of the population. In addition, the national interests, in their essence, have to derive from the aspirations of the majority of the country's population that are expressed in the democratic dialogue with authorities through political participation, and are implemented by the government structures in terms of domestic and foreign policy of the state, the latter being the focus of our further review

National interest has always been one of the basic concepts in the theory of International Relations, being crucial for establishing and promoting a balanced and rational state policy. Its importance has been historically proved throughout centuries, putting the countries with the most responsible approach to their national interests in a much more favorable position than other actors of the international system. Thus, being reviewed by a big number of political scientists, the concept of national interest has become the basis for the modern understanding of an effective state functioning. In this regard, many scientists, including the American historian A. Schlesinger Jr., consider that a state, that does not pay sufficient attention to national interest as the main engine of its policy, is less likely to survive (Köchler,2015:84).

The dynimics of national interests of the Republic of Moldova

The similar position is nowadays shared by the scientists from the Republic of Moldova as well – V. Beniuc and V. Juc consider that "ignoring the national interest represents an enormous threat for the existence of the state and nation itself". According to V. Beniuc, "a nation of the state, that has no determined interests, cannot count on a durable and sustainable development" (Nicolenco, 2013:32).

Therefore, the national interests of the Republic of Moldova include:

- ✓ Defending and guaranteeing human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- ✓ Developing a diverse economy that ensures material well-being and a decent standard of living for all citizens.
- ✓ Ensuring the existence of a sovereign, independent, united, and indivisible state.
- ✓ Building a rule of law state, promoting pluralistic democracy, and consolidating civil society.
- ✓ Ensuring national security.
- ✓ Restoring spirituality and strengthening national consciousness.
- ✓ European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Thus, the definition of national interests provides the Republic of Moldova with the opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to democratic values, freedom, and tolerance, being open to bilateral and multilateral dialogue and cooperation, and tending to become a security actor, thereby gaining more audience and credibility on the international stage, while also building relationships based on its national interests, both primary and secondary. Globalization has diluted the clear vision of national interest, and several Western states have attempted to build international relations based on idealism and common global development. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent Russo-Ukrainian war have shown that in crisis situations, states prioritize conserving resources primarily for their own populations, indicating that regardless of their political or ideological nature, they prioritize national interest (Tara John and Tim Lister, CNN, 2022).

The Republic of Moldova does not have any certain document, where its national interests would be clearly defined. Basically, at the moment these interests can be drawn from three main documents: the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, the Concept of foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova (1995) and the Concept of national security of the Republic of Moldova. Basing on the needs of state and population and on the risks for the country, V. Juc identifies the following national interests for the Republic of Moldova (Juc, 2009:122):

- Guaranteeing and ensuring the fundamental human rights and freedoms;
- Free development of the multisectoral economy, ensuring material well-being and a decent standard of living for all citizens;
- Ensuring the existence of the sovereign, independent, unitary and indivisible state;
- Building the rule of law, promoting pluralistic democracy and strengthening civil society; - Ensuring national security (military, economic, ecological, energetic, etc.);
- Spiritual restoration, restoration of the national consciousness of the people of the Republic of Moldova;
- European integration. Although these interests are already identified in the scientific environment, they are not taken into consideration by the ruling elites and, therefore, are not consistently promoted through the foreign policy of the state.

In practice, the realization of these interests is complicated by a number of reasons:

1. The national interests have a declarative character of implementation. For example, the free development of multisectoral economy cannot be achieved in the conditions of monopoly which is established in many domains in our country. In fact, there are no real measures accomplished by the authorities in order to prevent this monopoly.

2. There is no clearly defined system of national interests. All the political parties understand the country's interests differently and use their own views as applicable for the whole country.

3. There is no political will to build the system of national interests.

4. There is no national idea that would unite all the citizens, disregarding their political or geopolitical preferences.

5. The division of the Moldovan society. It is impossible to restore the national consciousness of the people in conditions when there are disputes about the language they speak or the ethnicity they are.

6. The geopolitical location of the Republic of Moldova, being a buffer zone between two major powers – European Union and Russia.

7. The instruments of national interests' promotion are not used properly. For instance, Republic of Moldova has a great potential of using soft power means in spreading its culture through diaspora located all over the world.

Through these instruments, Moldova has the possibility to create an image of a reliable partner in the region. Unfortunately, this potential is not used yet.

8. There is no certain foreign policy vector determined. Because of these reasons, the Republic of Moldova has a pretty weak position in the international arena. It is still dependent on the only energetic source, its economy is not developed enough to compete with other economies in the region, its national interests vary in dependence on the ruling party or ruling coalition. All these make the foreign policy and the geopolitical position of the Republic of Moldova pretty unstable.

The national interest of the Republic of Moldova is expressed in its liberal form, meaning that it is perceived by the majority of society and subsequently expressed through voting for parties that identify with this interest. Moldova has a set of primary and secondary national interests. The primary interests of Moldova largely align with those of other countries, namely the preservation of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the existence of the state. An exception in the case of Moldova is Article 142 of the Constitution, which gives citizens the choice to preserve or dissolve the state. This article was proposed by constitutionalists who worked on the Constitution and viewed Moldova's statehood as temporary until its return to the borders of Romania. On March 2, 1992, the Republic of Moldova was recognized as an international subject by the UN General Assembly, and the process of shaping national interests began for the next 30 years. However, Article 142 of the constitution has not changed, creating a discrepancy between the national interest of preserving statehood and the possibility of its dissolution (Constituţia Republici Moldova, 1994).

Since its young independence, the Republic of Moldova has experienced a high dynamic of national interest. There are three directions of foreign policy that correspond to three types of electorates and different primary national interests:

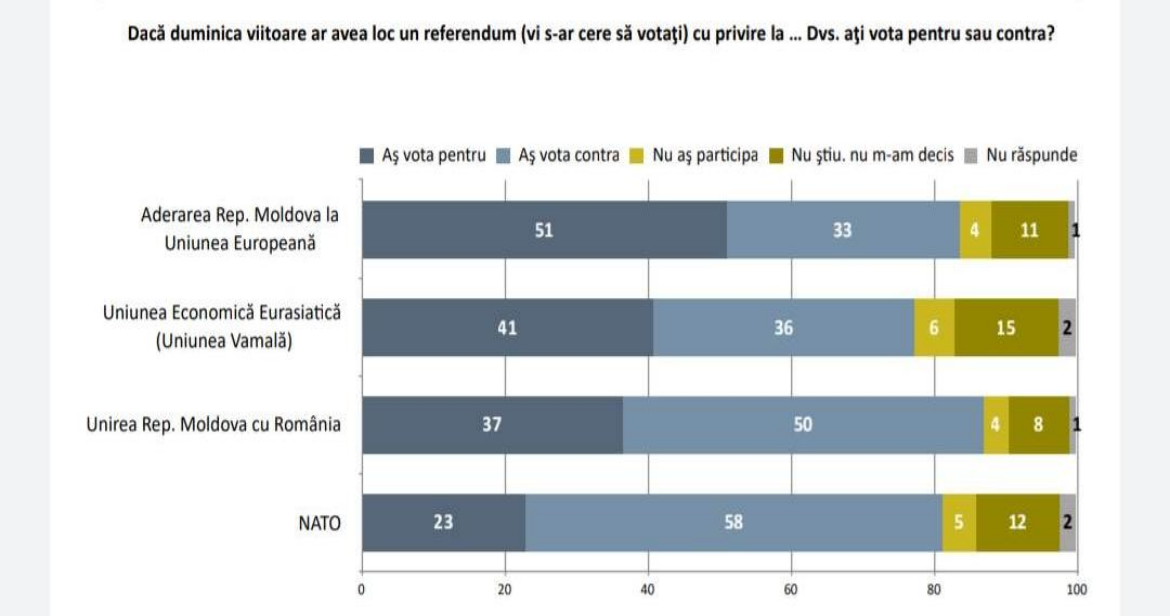
- ✓ The pro-Russian sovereigntist electorate.
- ✓ The pro-European sovereigntist electorate.
- ✓ The pro-Romanian unionist electorate.

These three geopolitical directions involve different visions of national interest. Pro-Europeans and the pro-Russian electorate are sovereigntists who see the national interest in the statehood, sovereignty, and independence of the Republic of Moldova. However, unionists perceive the national interest in connection with the national interest of Romania, which means the dissolution of the Moldovan state and returning to Romania as it was during the interwar period. The national interest of the unionists contradicts the notion of primary national interest and creates a dissonance in defining it. The growing dynamics of unionism expressed through voting and sociological research confirm an increase in the interest of unionists.

Since the first democratic elections in the Republic of Moldova, we have observed a dynamic of secondary national interest and a slow growth of primary national interest. Until the 2000s, there was a continuous increase in pro-European and unionist sentiments and a decrease in pro-Russian sentiment, especially fueled by the Moldovan-Russian war in Transnistria. After 2000, tensions regarding the Transnistrian region calmed down, and with the support of Moscow, pro-Russian forces, led by the Communist Party, took over the country with over 70 mandates.

The pro-Russian era ended in 2009, and pro-European alliances emerged, bringing more prosperity and gaining trust from citizens. However, the theatrical coup led by the leader of the Democratic Party, Vlad Plahotniuc, who arrested Vlad Filat and seized control of the Republic of Moldova, eroded the image of pro-European forces and popularized the Party of Socialists, which seemed like a good alternative to the pro-European corrupt politicians. This led to the victory of Igor Dodon in the presidential elections. However, Dodon discredited the image of the Party of Socialists, and it currently stands at only 27.8% according to the latest research."Sociological data, even though two years ago it was close to 40%, according to a survey conducted by IMAS between March 9-23, 2021 (IMAS, 2021,09.09-23.03) .

According to the same survey, the option of unification with Romania is supported by 38% of the citizens, although 8 years ago, surveys showed this option being embraced by 25-30%. The latest CBS Research survey presented in Bucharest by the Romanian Academy and IDIS Viitorul showed 34.4% unionists, while other sociological companies provide data of 37%, which demonstrates the increasing dynamics of the unionists. By relying on statistical data and political preferences from recent sociological research, we can deduce the dynamics of national interest through the perspective of stakeholders, namely civil society and political parties." (CBS Research).



The conservative national interest is losing intensity in the face of the liberal national interest, through the prism of the democratization of the Republic of Moldova and the dynamics of national interest presented by civil society. Thus, we can conclude that not only secondary interests are dynamic, but also the primary ones. If the unionist option has reached 37%, we can summarize that the pro-European statist option is at 20%, which represents 60% of the total, with only 20% being statist and 40% unionist. The pro-Eastern option is currently rated at 25%, resulting in a total of approximately 45% sovereigntists and nearly 40% unionists, while the rest do not participate in the country's political life. The primary national interests undergo significant changes over time and create a contradiction between the primary national interests of maintaining and preserving the statehood and sovereignty of the country. The temporal factor will bring about major changes in the national interest of the Republic of Moldova, and the political class will need to adapt to new social options and create conditions for the implementation of social aspirations, while respecting universal human values and national and international law, in line with the constitutional spirit and the values of the UN Charter.

Social Cohesion as an indispensable component of national security

Social cohesion has become a widely discussed element in several countries that face security issues, particularly within the European Union during Romania's presidency from January 1 to June 30, 2019 (Manole, 2022). Sociologist Emile Durkheim used the concept of social cohesion, considering it to be the future order of society, characterized by interdependence, loyalty, and solidarity among members of society (Durkheim, Emile. 1897). Aspects often mentioned in describing social cohesion include strengthening social relationships, sharing values and a common mode of interpretation, experiencing a common identity and a sense of community, as well as trust among community members.

The issue of social cohesion started to be widely discussed after the EU began implementing its projects of economic, social, and political cohesion within the structures of the European Union, and member states decided to extend this concept to their close neighborhood, which includes both the Republic of Moldova and the Eastern Partnership states, Ukraine and Georgia. These states need to reduce social vulnerabilities in order to effectively respond to threats. In fact, the Eastern Partnership states, including Moldova, have been included in European programs to strengthen cohesion.

The Republic of Moldova has an acute deficiency of cohesion in all dimensions, and 30 years of independence have not been enough to create strong enough shared sentiments and experiences for the state to be able to effectively respond to emerging challenges. Without the involvement of external partners, especially Romania, the Republic of Moldova is not capable of maintaining a social and economic policy that

meets the needs of its citizens. The mass emigration of Moldovan citizens and the significant number of Moldovan citizens acquiring Romanian citizenship demonstrate that Moldovan citizens are not sufficiently attached to Moldova, and the majority would not miss the opportunity to obtain the citizenship of a European state in order to emigrate to the EU for a better life, although this position is not absolute.

For citizens of a state to be in solidarity with each other and for social cohesion to be satisfactory and effective, there is a need for a society that is conscious of its identity, or at least in the case of the Republic of Moldova, when discussing identity, there is a major confusion, and each citizen has uncertainties about their ethnic identity, often confusing geographic terms with ethnic ones and vice versa. All these indicate that the Soviet experiment of constructing a separate nation from the Romanian one has partially succeeded in denationalizing a part of the population, and the lack of state programs to address this issue only prolongs the social vulnerability of the Republic of Moldova (IPP.2012).

The ongoing armed conflict in eastern and southern Ukraine has demonstrated that Ukrainian social cohesion has been the main factor that has withstood and responded to Russian aggression. The first step towards achieving social cohesion in Ukraine was in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and initiated an armed conflict in the eastern part of the country. At that time, the main social groups that consolidated to defend the country were patriotic groups, with many young people enlisting in the army to fight and halt the conflict.

After 2014, Ukraine launched a widespread campaign to mobilize its citizens in solidarity with the country's integrity, relying on the oldest state instrument, nationalism, which Hans J. Morgenthau describes in his book "Politics Among Nations" as the most important tool for mobilizing society against external aggression (Hans J. Morgenthau, 2005, 80).

Nationalism is based on human instincts related to territory, which manifest in both the animal kingdom and humans. Often, these instincts are not easily explainable in rational or psychological terms, but they can be understood from a biological perspective by drawing parallels with the animal kingdom. Nationalism also encompasses the tribal instinct that currently unifies the nation against external enemies. Thus, these primal instincts, although not fully rational or psychological, become instruments of social cohesion that consolidate a society's capacity to respond to external aggression (Manole,2022).

All interethnic conflicts or wars between nations involve nationalism, both in the case of the aggressed state and the imperial nationalism of the aggressor state. However, defensive nationalism is stronger and elicits more decisive reactions, as the attacked nation faces the risk of its existence, leading society to become more combative and willing to sacrifice. Ukraine managed nationalism correctly after 2014, raising the level of social cohesion, albeit with some violations of minority rights

(LARICS, 2022). When nationalism is heightened, unfortunate excesses occur that are difficult to avoid. This can be observed in cases of chauvinism from the majority nation towards ethnic minorities with whom they must coexist, viewing them with suspicion as elements from outside the nation. Despite these challenges, Ukraine built social cohesion based on nationalism, and the response to Russian aggression was unexpectedly strong, surpassing the expectations of military and political experts.

The Republic of Moldova has a majority nation that should foster social cohesion based on shared values and sentiments. According to the 2014 census data, in Moldova, 75.1% of the population consists of Moldovan Romanians, while the rest are ethnic minorities. This figure clearly reflects a majority nation, if not for issues related to the perception of its identity. According to the latest survey data in the Republic of Moldova, 39% of the total population are unionists, largely representing Moldovans who identify with their Romanian identity (BNS, recensământ 2014). This accounts for approximately half of the total Moldovan Romanians. Thus, in the Republic of Moldova, there are approximately 35% Moldovans, 35% Romanians, 7.0% Ukrainians, 6.6% Gagauz, 4.6% Russians, 4.1% Bulgarians, 1.9% Roma, and other ethnicities constituting 0.5% of the population (Centrul de Investigații Sociologice și Marketing „CBS – Research) (CBS – Research, 2014).

Based on statistical and demographic data, it can be deduced that regardless of whether there is a majority ethnicity in the Republic of Moldova, the country still faces a lack of cohesion due to a distorted awareness of its own identity. The main cause of this distortion is the Soviet Moldovenism ideology, first implemented in the Transnistrian region with the establishment of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (RASSM) in 1924, and later extended to Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina after 1940 when the USSR separated these territories from the Kingdom of Romania.

Soviet Moldovenism is recognized by half of Moldovans as a historical truth, and they refuse to acknowledge their Romanian identity. Partially, the Soviet experiment has had a considerable influence. However, at the same time, the number of Moldovans identifying as Romanians has increased from 2% in 2004 to 6.9% and 39% unionists in 2022. This indicates that awareness of belonging to the Romanian nation is growing among Moldovans (Recensământul populației din 2004, ediția 2006). Eventually, all Romanian-speaking individuals in the Republic of Moldova will find themselves with the same identity concepts.

The social cohesion of the Republic of Moldova is certainly dependent on the national consciousness of the majority ethnicity, the Romanian Moldovans. Therefore, we have an identity dilemma in the midst of a social cohesion problem and loyalty to the state of the Republic of Moldova. According to the Romanian Border Police on February 25, 2022, within a 24-hour interval, at the border with the Republic of Moldova, there were 18,728 individuals crossing (12,055 entering the country), and on

the previous day, there were 14,228 individuals (7,972 entering the country) - an increase of 31.6% (Situaţia la frontieră, (23 - 24 februarie 2022). Thus, on the first day of the war when it was not even clear if Russia would reach the border of the Republic of Moldova, the exodus of the population increased by 31.6%. The conflict in the neighboring country alone caused one-third of Moldovans to leave the country without any specific threats to the Republic of Moldova being articulated.

According to another survey by "CBS - Research," when asked, "In the event of a defensive war against Russia's invasion or the Transnistrian army, are you personally ready to fight with a weapon in hand in defense of the Republic of Moldova?" only 24.4% responded positively, and 10% said rather yes, with a dose of uncertainty. These data indicate the lack of willingness of Moldovans to defend their country (CBS – Research, 2022) . Resolving this issue will come with the clarification of the ethnicity of Romanian-speaking individuals. The idea of social cohesion based on civic identity does not yield positive results for various reasons, and this greatly depends on the climate and security that is entirely lacking in Moldova due to the frozen conflict in Transnistria and the Russo-Ukrainian war at the border Social cohesion largely depends on the ability of the majority ethnicity, the Romanian Moldovans, to mobilize in response to a crisis. Only through a broad recognition of common identity, shared values, cultural, linguistic, historical ties, etc., can social cohesion be achieved, allowing for the inclusion of minorities. If the majority ethnicity, representing 75% of the population, cannot mobilize or has divergent opinions, then ethnic minorities will also be unable to join in the absence of a solid majority.

Social cohesion can certainly be achieved through values other than identity, but on a smaller scale. When it comes to armed aggression, the strongest reactions are instinctual, based on territorial cult and tribal defense of women and children. No matter how educated and cultured people may be, the majority of decisions are still instinctual, and the instinct of self-preservation is highly developed in human beings. This cannot be overlooked. Only after that does solidarity based on values, rather than primal animal instincts, come into play. In order for the Republic of Moldova to successfully build social cohesion, it needs to address the identity dilemma of Romanian Moldovans through various state programs and initiatives. This identity issue should be elevated to the highest level, placed on the public agenda, while simultaneously organizing other multidimensional programs for social cohesion, following the example of European states that have demonstrated a high degree of resilience in times of crisis (IPRE, 13.02.2018).

Conclusion

Social cohesion is essential for ensuring national security. The state is an organism composed of its institutions and citizens, which cannot function separately. In order for the state to operate effectively and ensure the well-being and security of

its citizens, mutual support is needed to foster social cohesion. The response to crises is much more effective when society is united around the state institutions that ensure collective action. However, social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova is weak and dysfunctional due to the lack of a common national interest among its citizens.

The majority population in the Republic of Moldova faces identity issues, and their values and interests are not aligned around a common interest that could become a national interest and a catalyst for social cohesion. The approach to identity in social cohesion is an indispensable component of national interest in the Republic of Moldova, as it ensures the stability, security, and sustainable development of the country. National interest in the Republic of Moldova has experienced fluctuations depending on the dynamics of the main interests. The principal interest of a state cannot be contested as in the case of the Republic of Moldova. The elements indicating that the Republic of Moldova is heading towards a failed state highlight a dissonance that is unprecedented in other countries. The loss of interest in preserving the statehood, independence, and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova also indicates an increase in the level of national consciousness.

The majority ethnic group, Moldo-Romanians, represents 75% of the population, but this majority is unable to create ethnic-based social cohesion as seen in Ukraine due to differing views on ethnic belonging. Mathematically speaking, Romanian speakers are divided almost equally between Moldovans and Romanians, and the national interest varies from one ideological group to another. The aim of this work is to demonstrate that the Republic of Moldova can serve as a precedent of dissonance concerning national interest, different from other states that have unionist visions with other entities. The research shows a growing preference for pro-European and unionist views over pro-Russian views, and a majority of unionist supporters within the pro-European majority. This unique situation can create a national interest for the majority ethnic group beyond the state of residence.

National interest is necessarily supported by a majority of society regardless of ethnicity, but it is essential for it to be supported by the majority ethnic group. In order to promote national interest and strengthen social cohesion, it is crucial to clarify national identity and promote common values. In this regard, the government and state institutions have an important role in developing and implementing strategic programs that address identity dilemmas and promote social cohesion. These programs should include education and awareness of identity, the promotion of democratic values, solidarity, civic responsibility, as well as the creation of a favorable and equitable legislative framework for all citizens. National interest cannot be achieved in the absence of a cohesive and united society.

Social cohesion brings significant benefits in terms of national security, economic development, prosperity, and international influence of a country. A united and cohesive society is more resilient to internal and external challenges, with the

capacity to address threats and capitalize on opportunities for well-being and prosperity in line with national interest. To strengthen social cohesion and promote national interest, the Republic of Moldova needs to pay special attention to common values, education, civic participation, and dialogue among different ethnic and cultural groups. The promotion of a clear national identity for Romanian-speaking individuals is essential.

Alongside clarifying national identity, the Republic of Moldova must develop and implement policies and programs that respond to the needs and aspirations of its citizens, particularly in the areas of economic development, employment, access to social services, and improved living standards. A strong and prosperous economy contributes to increased social cohesion and the preservation of national interest.

The end of history predicted by Fukuyama did not materialize, and the dynamics of global conflicts are increasing as the balance of power between major nations is reshaped. Globalization following the Western model is coming to an end, and the decoupling of the American and Chinese economies indicates that national interest is more important for major powers than a peaceful development where there can be winners and losers solely on an economic level. The conflict-prone nature of human beings redefines interstate relations, and national interest remains the most legitimate source of interstate relations. Only based on national interests can common interests be found, and relationships with development partners be established. National interest depends on the internal vision of it. Distorting national interest creates chaos in a state's foreign policy and hampers the process of developing relationships with other states. Thus, in the Republic of Moldova, we have a vicious circle in which three fundamental components revolve: Identity >>> Cohesion >>> National Interest, which are interdependent and upon **which the security and well-being of the state and its population depend.**

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