

THE SECURITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE: REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

Svetlana CEBOTARI¹⁶

Natalia PUTINĂ¹⁷

Abstract. *The war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine represents the most consequential military conflict in Europe since the end of World War II, generating profound political, economic, and security repercussions across the region. For the Republic of Moldova, the impact of the war is twofold: it has amplified existing vulnerabilities—particularly regarding the unresolved Transnistrian conflict, economic fragilities, energy dependence, and social pressures—while simultaneously opening new opportunities for European integration and geopolitical reorientation. The article examines the security implications arising from the increased militarization and hybrid activities in the Transnistrian region, including the risks associated with the Cobasna ammunition depot and the presence of Russian and paramilitary forces. Economically, Moldova has faced disrupted supply chains, inflationary pressures, and rising energy costs, yet also experienced growth in exports and revitalised transport routes. The energy crisis accelerated Moldova's strategic shift toward the European energy system, reducing dependence on Russian-controlled infrastructure. On the sociopolitical level, the refugee influx tested institutional capacities but also strengthened EU-Moldova cooperation. The granting of EU candidate status in June 2022 marks a critical window of opportunity, positioning the Republic of Moldova on a transformative European trajectory despite persistent security challenges.*

Keywords: *security, military conflict, the war in Ukraine*

The war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine is shaping up to be the most important military conflict since the end of World War II. The Russian-Ukrainian war is not just a regional war. It is the war that marks a rupture in the relations between Russia and the West, a war that will have profound repercussions both for Europe and the whole world.

Any war, especially of this intensity, which we are witnessing in Ukraine, is usually an element of political-military and economic-social change, which causes changes in the security dimension as well. For a better understanding of the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Republic of Moldova, it is necessary to highlight the main present aspects. Of course, taking into account the magnitude of the subject, we do not pretend to cover the multitude of aspects involved, but we will point out the most important moment.

¹⁶ Doctor habilitatus, university professor, Moldova State University, Republic of Moldova, E-mail: svetlana.cebotari@usm.md

¹⁷ Associate professor, Moldova State University, Republic of Moldova, E-mail: natalia.putina@usm.md

The impact of the war in Ukraine on the Republic of Moldova

The war started by the Russian Federation in Ukraine has a double impact on the Republic of Moldova. Along with negative factors, that prevail, the war also opened some windows of opportunity for the Republic of Moldova. The war in Ukraine highlighted the main risks to the country's security:

a) Eastern zone of the Republic of Moldova

Approximately three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the achievement of independence, but also in the context of the war in Ukraine, the eastern area of the Republic of Moldova remains one of the main problems. The events of February 24, 2022, or the „special operation” of Russia in Ukraine conditioned the manifestation of increased interest in the Transnistrian area. The Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine brought the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova back into the spotlight. The eastern area of the Republic of Moldova, or the self-declared „r.m.n.” has an area of 4163 km, which is approximately 12% of the country's territory, and a population of approximately 505153 inhabitants (according to the 2014 census) (Matei, Neguț, Nicolae, 2016, p.447).

Having its administration: presidency, parliament, and currency, as a result of the conflict of March 2, 1992, the so-called „Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR)” developed the structures of a quasi-state. Concerning the Transnistrian region, the situation is ambiguous: on the one hand, the focus of interest and resources on the invasion of Ukraine has weakened Moscow's financing of the region, on the other hand, Transnistria remains the region with an increased risk of the Russians are opening a new front to invade Ukraine, which will directly affect the Republic of Moldova. Positioned between Moldova and Ukraine, the Transnistrian area represents a geopolitical consequence of the Cold War. For a better understanding of the impact that the Transnistrian area can have on regional security, it is necessary to highlight the main aspects that give this region special attention.

The increased interest of Russia towards the Republic of Moldova also depends on the geographical location. The Republic of Moldova is a country where Western powers meet, and Moscow, most likely, “will remain politically paralyzed in the short or even medium term”, claims the American agency Stratfor. The geographic location of Moldova makes it important for Russia, being a traditional invasion route from the Southwest and the Balkan states. It is located near the strategic port of Odesa and the Crimean peninsula, where Russia, until 2014, stationed its fleet on the Black Sea and is part of the energy transit network that connects Russia with Europe and Turkey. With the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the emphasis changed, the geostrategic role of the peninsula increased, and the geostrategic role of the Republic of Moldova for Russia decreased. The war started by the Russian Federation in Ukraine has once again brought to the attention of the international community the role that the Transnistrian area can play in Russia's strategies. Although there is a decrease in the geostrategic importance of the Republic of Moldova for the Russian Federation, however, Russia, according to the provisions of the Foreign Policy Concept of December 12, 2016 (Article 58), considers Moldova as an area for which Russian Federation shows interest and speaks for the preservation of the status especially of the Transnistrian region (Conceptia Politicii externe

a Federației Ruse, 2016). In the new version of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, adopted on March 31, 2023, the Republic of Moldova is addressed in the context of CIS member states (Conceptia Politicii externe a Federației Ruse, 2023).

An important aspect that deserves attention is the activity of some companies in the eastern part of the country. The most famous are the enterprises “Pribor”, “Met-alorucav”, “Kirov Electrical Appliances”, the industrial complex “Electromaș” located in Tiraspol, and the metallurgical and hydraulic industrial complex in Râbnîța, which, under the official cover of production of electrical appliances and household items, they dealt with the illegal production of weapons (until the establishment of the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Moldova and Ukraine - EUBAM). The range of weapons illegally manufactured in these industrial complexes is varied. Thus, among the models of weaponry manufactured illegally in the Transnistrian area, the following can be mentioned: 20-tube multi-launchers, placed on “ZIL 131” and “Ural 365” vehicles (they were exported to conflict areas, such as Abkhazia). Other weapons models are also produced: Spig-7 and Spig-9 anti-tank grenade launchers, 82 and 120 mm mines, 50 mm portable mine launchers, Katran model. Revolvers of this model are also illegally manufactured: 9mm Pm, 7.62mm Tt, 5.45mm Psm, 7.62mm and 5.45mm, Ak 47 Kalashnikov Assault Weapons, 9mm Compact Machine Guns, Pcela and Gnom Grenade Launchers, Vasiliok mines (some of which were sold to the Chechen rebels), Duga mobile weapon launchers, Npgm-40 grenade launchers designed for use on Ask 74 machine guns, 82 mm mine launchers, anti-personnel mines Pnd in wooden case, Gp-15 model 40mm grenade launchers (Sartori, 2006).

In this context, the military depot at Cobasna, near the town of Râbnîța, located in the north of Transnistria, is also of interest. Located on an area of about 132 ha, about 42 thousand tons of conventional weapons, ammunition, and war material from the ex-Soviet period were stored at the military warehouse in Cobasna. The town of Cobasna is 2 kilometers away from the border with Ukraine. The ammunition depot at Cobasna in Transnistria preserves the weapons heritage of the former 14th Army of the Soviet Union, but also part of the armaments of the former GDR and Czechoslovakia: more than 20,000 tons of ammunition are currently stored here. During the Soviet period, the warehouse in Cobasna was known as warehouse no. 1411 artillery munitions, representing the strategic arsenal of the South-West Military District of the USSR. Most of the ammunition was stored here after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), Czechoslovakia, and other former Warsaw Pact countries (Digi24).

Experts from the Academy of Sciences of Moldova carried out some analyses and estimates, back in 2005, according to the known data about the content and quantity of ammunition stored on the left side of the Dniester. Thus, according to studies carried out by AȘM experts, in the event of a deflagration, the power of the explosion could be equivalent to that of an atomic bomb similar to the one dropped on Hiroshima. A possible explosion of the military warehouse in Cobasna can be compared to the detonation of a nuclear bomb with a capacity of 10 kilotons, which was dropped over the city of Hiroshima in 1945 (Timpul, 2020).

A possible explosion of the warehouses can lead to the destruction of brick walls and reinforced concrete structures in the localities located at a distance of 4.5 kilometers from

the epicenter. After the explosion, a crater with a radius of 1.5 kilometers and a depth of 75 meters will be formed. However, given that Cobasna is located in a rural environment, the range of the explosion can reach 40-50 kilometers, including as far as Orhei. Therefore, the effects of the explosion can be compared to the damage caused by an earthquake of 7-7.5 degrees. Also, according to experts' estimates, the explosion of the ammunition depot in the village of Cobasna will lead to an impact of the population, to a humanitarian and ecological catastrophe in the north-eastern region of the Republic of Moldova and on the territory of Ukraine over an area of 500 to 3000 kilometers squares. The recycling and evacuation of the armament is in this case the only possibility to prevent any spontaneous explosion of the munitions in the military warehouses in Transnistria (Reniță, 2020).

At the moment, Moscow has roughly twenty thousand tonnes of ammo in the Transnistrian region. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (FACE) and the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit Declaration specified that these arsenals and forces have to be unconditionally removed from the Republic of Moldova territory by 2002. Russia withdrew from the FACE Treaty in 2007 and is currently holding conditions for the full withdrawal of its military forces and ammunition from the Republic of Moldova. This is in contrast to Chisinau, which focuses on the complete and unconditional withdrawal of military forces and ammunition. As a result, the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict has been delayed. Russia has removed some of its conventional arsenals or has been illegally trafficked and traded in different parts of the world. In the composition of the military and paramilitary forces of Transnistria, there are 16 thousand effective, subdivided into 4 motorized infantry brigades deployed in Tiraspol, Râbnița, and Dubăsari, equipped with advanced equipment and technology. The complex has 18 tanks, 107 armored vehicles, 73 guns, 46 anti-aircraft installations, and 173 antiquarian units. The air fleet consists of 9 Mi-8T helicopters, 6 Mi-24 helicopters, Mi-2 helicopters, and An-2, An-26 and Yak-18 aircraft. Officially, there would be around 1200 Russian soldiers in the area. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, the Kyiv press wrote that at least 5 thousand soldiers would be present in Transnistria (Reniță, 2020).

It should also be mentioned that, currently, the following personnel are located in the eastern area:

1. The Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, the security company, or. Tiraspol (about 200 soldiers);
2. 1st Motorized Infantry Brigade, Tiraspol (700 soldiers);
3. 2nd Motorcycle Infantry Brigade (Training Center) or. Bender (600 soldiers);
4. 3rd Motorized Infantry Brigade. Rîbnița 420 soldiers;
5. 4th Motorized Infantry Brigade. Dubăsari 450 soldiers;
6. The independent tank battalion stationed in the village of Vladimirovca (120 soldiers);
7. The independent special destination battalion Tiraspol (100 soldiers);
8. The independent artillery regiment of the village of Parcani (about 200 soldiers);
9. The anti-aircraft artillery regiment of Tiraspol (about 200 soldiers);
10. The independent aviation detachment or. Tiraspol (approx. 150 soldiers);
11. The independent transmission battalion of Tiraspol (about 200 soldiers);
12. The battalion of independent genius in the village of Parcani (about 220 soldiers);

13. Aviation technical base Tiraspol;
14. Base of repair or. Tiraspol;
15. Independent repair battalion or. Tiraspol;
16. The training center of the 4th Infantry Brigade in the village of Afanasievca, about 200 soldiers;
17. Peacekeeping forces Vladimirovca village (450).

Making a calculation, according to the sources cited in 2001, a potential of about 4500 military technical units was concentrated in the eastern area.

Currently, the military formations of the so-called “Pridnestrovian Moldavian **Republic** (PMR)” are structured by their own military doctrine no. 686, adopted on February 17, 2016, which provides for the maintenance of units with reduced staff, but capable of tripling their staff in case of need. Thus, each infantry brigade includes deployed command, guard, and security subunits (which ensure the daily activity of the unit), as well as one deployed infantry battalion (which ensures the training of recruits and the permanent formation of the military reserve). In case of military danger, the deployment of units to the states of war is foreseen. The material basis of the unrecognized “PMR” military formations is the combat technique, weapons, equipment, ammunition, and other material sources transmitted from the military units of the 14th Army both during the armed conflict of 1992 and in the following period.

At the endowment of the military formations of the so-called “Ministry of Defense of PMR” are: T-64 tanks - 18 units; armored fighting vehicles - 84 units; BTR-60 - 24 units; BTR-70 - 26 units; BTR-80 - 11 units; BTR-D - 12 units; BRDM - 7 units; BMP - 3 units; MTLB - 1 un. Artillery pieces about 10 units: self-propelled howitzers 122-mm type “Gvozdika” - 18 units; anti-tank guns 100-mm MT12 - 16 units; 85-mm guns - 12 units; M120 mine launchers - 45 units; 82-mm mine launchers - 40 one; launch systems for reactive projectiles BM-21 “Grad” - 20 un. Anti-aircraft guns - 49: AZP100 type 100-mm caliber - 10 units, C-60 type 57-mm caliber - 12 units; caliber 23mm type ZU 23-2 - 24 units; “Alazani” - 3 un.; complex medium-range (1-18 km) anti-aircraft missile defense systems of the Osa-2 type; short-range (0.3-5km) Igla-type anti-aircraft defense complexes, about 40 “FAGOT” type anti-tank missile complex units, about 30 units; ammunition with bullets about 20 000 un. The aviation subunits have 6 helicopters - MI-8T; 2 helicopters - MI; 1 plane - AN-26; 4 aircraft - AN-2 (2 under conservation); 2 aircraft - IAK-18 (50), 10 IAK-52 aircraft. The MI-8T helicopters are equipped with installations for launching «NURS” type missiles.

Under the management of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (PMR) also are: the internal troops are intended for the protection of state objects and the performance of various service and combat tasks. The composition of the internal troops is: Special Purpose Battalion «Dniester» deployed in the city of Tiraspol, 2 patrol detachments Pervomaisk and Parcani, 7 patrol militia sections, the «Dniester» Battalion is directly subordinated to the Minister of Internal Affairs of the a.z. MRI The workforce has about 400 people. In the eastern part of the Republic of Moldova, there are weapons: 82 mm mine launchers, anti-tank grenade launchers, machine guns, machine guns, sniper rifles, etc. The total strength of the subunits of the internal troops is subordinated to about 700 people. Another institution that has military forces is the Ministry of State Security of the so-

called «Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic". The following components are part of the Armed Forces of the «RMN»: the «Delta" special purpose battalion (located in the city of Tiraspol) with a force of 150 soldiers. Also under the management of the «Ministry» are armored cars, grenade launchers, light weapons, etc.

A component of the forces of the «Ministry» is also the independent Cossack Regiment of Border Guards (stationed in the city of Tiraspol) with an effective number of 300 soldiers. The regiment is equipped with infantry weapons and about 20 BTR-60, and BTR-70 armored personnel carriers. Other military forces present in the Transnistrian area are the border guard troops formed by a training detachment (located in the city of Tiraspol), 7 commands (Camenca, Rîbnița, Dubăsari, Grigoriopol, Bender, Tiraspol, Slobozia), 29 border guard pickets and 30 of border control posts. In the Transnistrian area, there is weaponry: armored fighting vehicles, mine launchers, grenade launchers, light weapons, and a military force of about 1,500 people (Reniță, 2020).

Also, Cossack troops from the Black Sea Region (ЧерноморскоеКазачьеВойско) are present in the Transnistrian area. The Cossack troops are the main reserve of the «RMN» FA. In the organization «ЧерноморскоеКазачьеВойско» there are 7 Cossack districts, established according to the territorial principle and which bring together the Cossacks from the nearby localities (towns). The number of Cossacks who can be mobilized reaches the figure of 3000 people (the total number of Cossacks and family members is about 10000 people).

The Territorial Defense Corps (people's Militia and Water Territorial Defense Corps (People's Militia and Civil Defense) (народное ополчение) (formed based on the decree of I. Smirnov of March 17, 1992) and the civil defense (formed in 1992) is the reserve of the Armed Forces of the RMN and is structured in territorial battalions. In peacetime, the popular militia and civil defense have permanent headquarters deployed in the district centers. Battalion deployment is carried out in case of military danger or for concentration and training applications. The battalion headquarters is completed with permanent personnel from the battalion commander to the company commander. The general staff has a staff of about 20 people and has an armament of about 150 machine guns. Also, the staff of the general staff constantly conducts combat training exercises with the commanders of the battalion company (Sartori, 2016).

Even if today the Republic of Moldova is not attacked conventionally, Russia has been exercising actions of hybrid aggression for a long time which, in the last period, is even more evident. There were several provocation attempts from Tiraspol throughout 2022. Thus on April 25, the media in the Transnistrian region reported that the so-called Ministry of State Security in Tiraspol was bombed with grenade launchers, even though at the time of the attack the building was empty. Later, on the morning of April 26, two explosions rang out in the Grigoriopol district, as a result of which two radio antennas of the «Maiak» center were taken out of operation. An attack on the military airfield in Tiraspol was also announced. Another indicator of security danger was the organization by the Russian military of military exercises and applications with grenade launchers in the Transnistrian region, an announcement made by the Russian Ministry of Defense itself. Meanwhile, the authorities in Kyiv sound the alarm regarding new threats to Ukraine's security coming from the left of the Dniester (Benchechi, 2023).

b) Economic effects

Immediate and medium-term effects of the war in Ukraine on the economy of the Republic of Moldova, according to the director of Expert-Group, Adrian Lupusor:

- the suspension of several supply chains of the Republic of Moldova with food products, including from the basic package;
- suspension of raw material imports for processing industries, for example the furniture industry;
- the continuous increase in the prices of energy resources;
- the need for companies to adapt, the identification of other import sources;
- increased transportation and logistics costs;
- inflationary effects.

The Republic of Moldova was strongly affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Inflation rose from 18.52% in February to 33.55% in August 2022, according to data provided by the National Bank of Moldova. An important aspect of the war in Ukraine is the fact that exports from the Republic of Moldova in 2022 exploded. If in 2021 exports totaled 3.1 billion dollars, in 2022 they increased to 4.3 billion dollars. According to the expert Veaceslav Ioniță, the war in Ukraine brought back to life the railway in the Republic of Moldova, which was practically inactive. The volume of transport services operated by rail in 2006 was 3.7 billion tons/km. A steady decline followed, reaching 0.6 billion tonnes/km in 2020 and rising to 0.7 billion tonnes/km in 2021.

c) Energy dependence

Due to the 80 percent energy dependence of the Republic of Moldova on the Cucurugan Power Plant in the Transnistrian region, Moscow has kept Chisinau under pressure for three decades. The war in Ukraine, including the energy crisis, has a direct impact on the energy security of the Republic of Moldova, highlighting a multitude of state vulnerabilities and inabilities present in the energy sector.

We highlight the same situation in the case of electricity, maintaining dependence on the Russian Federation through energy exported from the secessionist region (fed with Russian gas), and interconnection with international suppliers would allow for minimizing this dependence, bypassing the region controlled by the Russian Federation. In this sense, the Republic of Moldova and Romania will develop a joint action plan in case of an energy crisis, establishing a series of measures for the supply of electricity and natural gas: providing each other with alternative fuels to produce thermal energy 29 of the systems of central heating and electricity and thermal energy in cogeneration¹, thus, harmonizing national and European legislation in terms of energy.

The European Commission, in the context of the war started by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, is ready to provide support to Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia to ensure reliable and sustainable energy, ensuring the emergency synchronization of the electricity networks of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova with the European continental network (RepowerEU, 2022)

The Republic of Moldova was connected to the European energy network ENTSO-E (March 2022) (Realitatea.md), protecting itself from the perspective of energy security and minimizing the dependent influence on the secessionist region of the country. The beginning of the electrical interconnection between Romania and the Republic of Mol-

dova will be possible after the construction, equipping, and commissioning of a 500Mw Back-to-Back station in Vulcanesti and a 330kV line to Chisinau which will allow the import of a larger amount of electricity from Romania. Also, the 2nd part of the Moldova-Romania electrical interconnection project involves the development of the 400 kV lines Iași-Ungheni-Strășeni and the 400 kV line Bălți-Suceava (MFA; Enegy, 2022).

Although the interconnection to the European energy system is crucial for the development of the country's energy sector, the natural gas market is currently a priority. Thus, the expansion of the Iași-Ungheni-Chisinau gas pipeline is possible by implementing it in parallel with the interconnection carried out on the electricity market in Romania (Cenușă, 2016). In this context, the Republic of Moldova will be able to diversify both its natural gas and electricity supply sources. In this way, the Republic of Moldova has the chance to reduce its electricity dependence on the secessionist region and Gazprom's natural gas dependence. In the context of the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis, the international assistance granted to the Republic of Moldova, to overcome the created situation, was crucial to the dependence options presented by the Russian Federation. The integration carried out in the European energy space contributed to the reduction of dependence on the secessionist regime, but also on the Russian Federation. Thus, maintaining relations with European partners in providing security support in the field has accelerated the reorientation of the Republic of Moldova to the European energy system.

d) The social-political dimension

The refugee crisis and the help offered to refugees from Ukraine by citizens and authorities, represent a challenge to society in the Republic of Moldova. Since February 24, 2022, approximately 688,000 refugees from Ukraine have crossed the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Currently, the Republic of Moldova hosts over 80,000 refugees from Ukraine, more than half of whom are children. Thus, on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, refugees from Ukraine have full, free, and non-discriminatory access to medical assistance services. At the same time, the authorities of the Republic of Moldova ensured that the general education institutions in the country offer opportunities for all children from refugee families from Ukraine to participate in the educational process (Parlamentul RM, 2022).

Analyzing the consequences or effects of the presence of refugees from Ukraine on the Republic of Moldova, it should be noted that they had a positive influence on the Moldovan economy. They, being accommodated on the territory of our country, consumed goods bringing money to the national budget. At the same time, they glorified the HoReCa branch, staying in hotels, motels, and tourist guesthouses. Ukrainian companies glorified the Moldovan railways, but also the transport branch, transporting goods from and to Ukraine.

Analyzing the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Republic of Moldova, it should be noted that it had a positive impact on the political dimension of Moldovan-European relations. Influenced by the war in Ukraine, relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union reached one of the highest points of cooperation. Thus, on February 28, Ukraine applied to join the EU, and the next day, on March 1, 2022, the MEPs approved with a majority of 637 votes the resolution that offers Ukraine a European perspective. For the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, which together with Ukraine are

part of the group of countries of the Eastern Partnership, this moment serves as the European perspective and the objective of becoming full members of the EU. In the circumstances of the war in Ukraine, two days away from Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova submitted applications to join the European Union. For these countries, the status of a candidate country serves as a political shield of protection against Russia, which has never agreed to the rapprochement of the Eastern Partnership states with the EU (Agora, 2022).

The step that brought the Republic of Moldova closer to the EU was the signing on March 3 by President Maia Sandu of the request for the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union (Baciu, 2022).

Considering the common values and the close ties between the partners, established in the past by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their member states, on the one hand, and the Republic of Moldova, on the other, and which are developing within the European policy neighborhood and of the Eastern Partnership, and recognizing the common desire of the parties to develop, consolidate and further expand their relations. According to the provisions of the Agreement, the common values on which the EU is founded, namely democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the rule of law, also constitute the very essence of the political association and economic integration provided for in this Agreement. The agreement will pave the way for future progressive developments in EU-Republic of Moldova relations.

Recognizing that the Republic of Moldova, as a European country, has a common history and shares common values with the member states and is committed to implementing and promoting these values, which are a source of inspiration for the European choice of the country. Committing to strengthen respect for fundamental freedoms, human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, democratic principles, the rule of law, as well as good governance, on behalf of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, efforts are being made for the development of a democratic and European country, whole and free (CRJM, 2015).

Referring to the provisions of Article 2 of the Treaty of Accession to the European Union (TEU), we can mention that the values on which the EU focuses are: “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, as well as respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the member states in a society where pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men prevail”.

Any potential future EU member state will be assessed against these values. The country’s ability to demonstrate its willingness to act on these values will be essential for EU membership. As the EU is, at its core, the largest European peace project of all time, sharing and promoting these common values becomes particularly important in light of the war in Ukraine and other threats to European peace (Chirtoc, 2022). A no less important moment in the strengthening of Moldovan-European relations in the context of the war in Ukraine was the submission of the European Commission’s questionnaire regarding the EU accession request of the Republic of Moldova. After receiving Moldova’s request, the Council invited the European Commission to present its opinion on Mol-

dova's request, as the EU's first step in the accession process. To draft such an Opinion, the Commission presented a detailed Questionnaire to the Republic of Moldova. Based on the answers to the Questionnaire, which were elaborated and sent by the Republic of Moldova, the Commission issued its opinion with the following recommendations:

To recommend the granting of Candidate country status for Moldova and the possibility for Moldova to start accession negotiations.

To recommend the granting of Candidate status, but only after the fulfillment of specific conditions by Moldova.

The Member States of the EU decided the request for the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU, deciding unanimously, based on the Opinion of the Commission. Once the Republic of Moldova received the status of a Candidate country, the date for the opening of EU accession negotiations was set (most likely after the Republic of Moldova fulfilled additional conditions). Accession negotiations will be conducted until the country fulfills all EU accession requirements, in particular the political criteria requirements, as the fundamental values of the EU, as defined in Article 2 of the TEU, are assessed within the political criteria. Once the accession conditions of the Republic of Moldova are agreed upon, the Accession Treaty is negotiated, approved, and signed by Moldova and all EU Member States and the accession date is set. Also, to legitimize this step, the Republic of Moldova will organize a referendum in which its citizens will decide on the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union. Also, the Accession Treaty must be approved by the European Parliament and ratified by the Republic of Moldova, as well as by the national parliament of each EU Member State before it enters into force.

The questionnaire was the first crucial step in the EU accession process, which demonstrated the readiness of the Republic of Moldova to react through prompt and precise answers. Also, the Questionnaire was structured in such a way as to respect the format of the accession negotiations, which are organized in such a way as to include the Copenhagen accession criteria of 1993:

- 1) political criteria: the stability of the institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the respect and protection of minorities;
- 2) economic criteria: a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competition and market forces;
- 3) the capacity to assume the obligations arising from EU membership, including the administrative and institutional capacity to effectively implement the entire EU acquis (organized in over 30 negotiating chapters).

Thus, on April 11, 2022, in Luxembourg, the Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, handed to the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Nicu Popescu, the European Commission's questionnaire regarding the EU accession application of the Republic of Moldova. The answers that will be given to the questions in this questionnaire will represent the x-ray of the current situation in our country, showing the level of preparation for joining the European Union and, at the same time, highlighting the areas where additional efforts are needed. *"Our country is accelerating its European journey. I reiterated that we are part of Europe not only geographically, but also through the identity we carry, the values we*

share, through the Romanian language, the official EU language we speak, and through the common history we have.” - said Deputy Prime Minister Nicu Popescu (MFA, 2022).

The status of a candidate country would also mobilize the authorities to identify real solutions to two big problems that Moldova has in the perspective of accession: the Transnistrian problem and cleanliness in the field of justice. “Completion of the integration will only be possible when the Transnistrian issue is resolved, but this should not prevent us from working on the other files”, says MEP Siegfried Mureșan. And Chisinau is tying its hopes regarding the settlement of the Transnistrian dispute to a possible victory of Ukraine in the war launched by Russia against it - a victory that would radically change the outlook of the pro-Russian separatist regime on the left of the Dniester.

The date of May 19, 2022, was also an important one for the Republic of Moldova. It is the date when the European Parliament adopted the annual report on the implementation of the EU-Republic of Moldova Association Agreement, with 512 votes “for”, 43 votes “against” and 39 abstentions. The report includes a call for the European Union to provide more strategic support to Moldova after submitting its application to join the bloc. In the context of a worsening security environment, the text recognizes that the war in Ukraine has disproportionately affected the Republic of Moldova. Its economy has been affected by the loss of import and export opportunities and the rapid increase in energy prices, and the Republic of Moldova has also received the largest number of Ukrainian refugees per population than any other country, putting pressure on public services.

MEPs also draw attention to the need for more strategic aid for the Republic of Moldova, especially by establishing a support group of the Commission for this country, similar to the existing one for Ukraine. The report also emphasizes that the accession applications of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia open a new chapter in their European integration, which should be characterized by strengthened efforts to implement the association agreements and the components of trade liberalization. Last but not least, MEPs express their concern about a series of recent security incidents in the separatist region of Transnistria and condemn them as dangerous acts of provocation committed in a very volatile security situation. They reiterate their support for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Transnistria, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova (Călugăreanu, 2022a).

The text of the Resolution states that the Republic of Moldova was disproportionately affected by the Russian war in Ukraine. This is mainly due to the arrival of more than 450,000 Ukrainian refugees since the beginning of the invasion - of which almost 80,000 have remained in the Republic of Moldova - but also due to the decrease in trade and the increase in energy and transport prices. To this end, MEPs are calling for the EU to provide more support to the country, namely through new macro-financial assistance, additional transport and trade liberalization measures, and continued support for refugee management and humanitarian purposes.

In the context of Russia’s war against Ukraine, the Parliament welcomes the official application of the Republic of Moldova for EU membership submitted on 3 March 2022 and states that the EU should grant it the status of a candidate country, by Article 49 of the TEU and “based on merits”. Meanwhile, the European Union and the Republic of Moldova should continue their efforts to integrate the country into the EU single market

and to strengthen sectoral cooperation. The MEPs also ask the European Commission to quickly complete the evaluation of the request and to provide full assistance to the Republic of Moldova during this process. They state that, without anticipating the content of the Commission's opinion, the Moldovan authorities are undoubtedly on the right track by adopting key reforms, particularly in terms of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

The resolution also expresses its deep concern about the developments on the territory of the Transnistria region, which recorded a series of "security incidents" in April 2022 considered by MEPs as dangerous provocative acts in an extremely tense security situation. They also reiterate Parliament's support for a "comprehensive, peaceful and sustainable political solution to the Transnistrian conflict", namely based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders, as well as the withdrawal of stationed Russian forces there.

The Parliament emphasizes that it is unacceptable for Russia to use gas supplies as a weapon to exert political pressure on the Republic of Moldova, and to influence the country's political trajectory and geopolitical orientation, especially after the recent installation of the country's pro-Western government. MEPs call on the Commission and EU countries to support Moldova in ensuring its energy independence, connectivity, diversification, and energy efficiency, as well as in accelerating the development of renewable energy sources (Călugăreanu, 2022b).

Through the "historic" decision taken unanimously by the EU leaders, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova received the status of candidate countries for EU accession. By granting candidate status to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, the EU enlargement paradigm changed, and the enlargement policy received a new boost, qualifying the decision of the EU leaders as "a big step" and a historic step.

Also, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia received a new impetus to implement the reforms and projects that are still needed to take the next step in the historic achievement. Granting the European perspective to the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia represents important steps forward. This decision brings hope and confidence in the European future to the people of these countries and represents a great responsibility for their leaders (Agora, 2022).

Although the Republic of Moldova received on June 23, 2022, the status of a candidate country for accession to the European Union (EU), this status does not offer the status of a member state of the EU, as it is necessary for Moldova to fulfill a series of conditions for accession, as well as to apply European legislation in all areas. Experts in the field of international relations and European integration mention that the European path of the Republic of Moldova is difficult and that, in the context of the challenges faced by the EU, but also the countries with candidate status for accession, it may last an indefinite period. The relationship of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union brings security support to Romania even in the context of the war in Ukraine of 150 million euros for the support of Moldova. The assistance consists of non-reimbursable funds of 30 million euros and loans under advantageous conditions of 120 million euros.

The Republic of Moldova is the European country that received the largest number of refugees from Ukraine compared to its population. Over 370,000 refugees crossed the

border of the Republic of Moldova. Thus, the Plenary of the European Parliament with a large majority, 558 votes “for” and 10 abstentions and 20 “against” decided to grant macroeconomic assistance (Călugăreanu 2022b). In the context of the war in Ukraine, Oliver Varhelej, the European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement mentioned that the EU has increased the budgetary support offered to the Republic of Moldova. The €6 million support offered in December 2021 to manage the energy crisis is supported by another €75 million. The money was provided to overcome the challenges posed by Russia’s military aggression in Ukraine. In addition to managing the crisis, the EU continues to support the long-term resilience of the Republic of Moldova, in particular through the Eastern Partnership Investment Plan, which involves providing 34 billion euros for public and private investments in several key areas: support for SMEs, trade facilitation, energy efficiency (Moldova Suverană, 2022).

Conclusions

Analyzing the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Republic of Moldova, it is worth noting that it can be examined from two perspectives: one negative, and the other perspective offering a window of opportunity. Thus, from a negative perspective, the war highlighted the main risks to the security of the Republic of Moldova, such as the potential impact that the Transnistrian area can have on regional security. For the Russian Federation, the Transnistrian area of the Republic of Moldova represents an area of geostrategic interest, and this interest is determined by the following needs: preserving Russia’s strategic positions in Eastern Europe and maintaining the link with the military-industrial complex in the Transnistrian area. Also, the war in Ukraine has direct repercussions on the economic and energy dimension of the security of the Republic of Moldova.

Analyzed from the perspective of opportunities, the war in Ukraine attracted increased attention to this region from the Western states, opening up possibilities for the associated states from the eastern neighborhood, including the Republic of Moldova, through the unanimous decision of the EU member countries to obtain the status of a candidate country for integration in the EU. Although this status does not imply EU membership, it is still a possibility, as well as a hope for the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU. Also, in the context of the war in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, making considerable efforts, managed to get out of the sphere of energy influence of the Russian Federation by diversifying and reorienting itself to the European energy system.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- „Ce fel de muniții se află în depozitul de la Cobasna?” *Timpul*. Accesat la 2023. <https://timpul.md/articol/ce-fel-de-munitii-se-afla-in-depoziutul-de-la-cobasna-159067.html>.
- „Integrarea Ucrainei, Georgiei și Republicii Moldova în UE în timp de război – Quo vadis?” *Agora*, 7 martie 2022. <https://agora.md/stiri/99539/analiza-integrarea-ucrainei-georgiei-si-a-republicii-moldova-in-ue-in-timp-de-razboi-quo-vadis>. Accesat la 23 noiembrie 2023.
- „Ministrul Nicu Popescu a recepționat chestionarul Comisiei Europene cu privire la cererea de aderare la UE a Republicii Moldova.” MFA. <https://mfa.gov.md/ro/content/ministrul-nicu-popescu-receptionat-chestionarul-comisiei-europene-cu-privire-la-cererea-de>. Accesat la 23 noiembrie 2023.

- „REPowerEU: acțiune comună la nivel european pentru o energie mai accesibilă, mai sigură și mai durabilă.” European Commission. Accesat la 13 octombrie 2023. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ro/ip_22_1511.
- „Republica Moldova și Ucraina – conectate cu succes la rețeaua europeană de energie electrică!” Realitatea.md. Accesat la 17 octombrie 2023. <https://realitatea.md/republica-moldova-si-ucraina-conectate-cu-succes-la-reteauaeuropeana-de-energie-electrica/>.
- „Șanse semnificative ca R. Moldova și Ucraina să primească statutul de țări candidate la UE.” *Agora*. <https://agora.md/stiri/103610/sanse-semnificative-ca-r-moldova-si-ucraina-sa-primeasca-statutul-de-tari-candidate-la-ue-opinia-unui-jurnalist-dupa-dezbaterile-de-luni-ale-comisiei-europene>. Accesat la 23 noiembrie 2023.
- „Transnistria susține că au fost trase focuri de armă dinspre Ucraina asupra depozitului de muniții al armatei ruse de la Cobasna.” Digi24. Accesat la 11 octombrie 2023. <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/transnistria-sustine-ca-au-fost-trase-focuri-de-arma-dinspre-ucraina-asupra-depozitului-de-munitii-al-armatei-ruse-de-la-cobasna-1919373>.
- „UE își extinde sprijinul bugetar pentru Moldova.” *Moldova Suverană*, 22 iulie 2022.
- „Ursula von der Leyen o asigură pe Maia Sandu că Republica Moldova nu va rămâne fără gaze.” Digi24. Accesat la 13 octombrie 2023. <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ursula-von-der-leyen-o-asigura-pe-maia-sandu-carepublica-moldova-nu-va-ramane-fara-gaze-1714285>.
- „Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации (утверждена Президентом Российской Федерации В.В. Путиным 31 марта 2023 г.).” Accesat la 10 octombrie 2023. https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/1860586/.
- „Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации 2016 года.” Ministerul Afacerilor Externe al Federației Ruse. Accesat la 15 septembrie 2023. http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2542248.
- Baciu, A. „Maia Sandu a ținut un discurs în Parlamentul European: Acordarea statutului de țară candidat este decizia cea bună.” *Agora*. <https://agora.md/stiri/102605/maia-sandu-a-tinut-un-discurs-in-parlamentul-european-acordarea-statutului-de-tara-candidat-este-decizia-cea-buna-live>. Accesat la 23 noiembrie 2023.
- Bencheci, M. „Impactul războiului ruso-ucrainean asupra securității Republicii Moldova.” *Omul, criminologia, știința*, ediția II, Chișinău, 2023, pp. 224–229.
- Călugăreanu, V. „Ideea națională care ar coagula moldovenii.” *Deutsche Welle*, 18 mai 2022. <https://www.dw.com/ro/statutul-de-candidat-la-aderare-ar-fi-ideea-na%C8%9Bional%C4%83-care-ar-coagula-moldovenii/a-61837566>. Accesat la 18 decembrie 2023.
- Călugăreanu, V. „Rezistența Ucrainei oferă o fereastră de oportunitate pentru Moldova.” *Deutsche Welle*, 1 martie 2022. <https://www.dw.com/ro/rezisten%C8%9Ba-ucrainei-ofer%C4%83-o-fereastr%C4%83-de-oportunitate-pentru-moldova/a-60959124>. Accesat la 18 decembrie 2023.
- Cenușă, D. „Interconectarea energetică cu UE: Rețeta pentru diminuarea dependenței față de regiunea transnistreană și Rusia.” *IPN*, 28 martie 2016. https://www.ipn.md/ro/interconectarea-energetica-cu-ue-reteta-pentru-diminuarea-dependentei-fata-de-7978_1026301.html. Accesat la 18 decembrie 2023.
- Chirtoc, I. „Sprijin masiv din partea Parlamentului European pentru aderarea Republicii Moldova la UE.” *Ziare.com*. <https://ziare.com/razboi-ucraina-rusia/aderare-ue-republica-moldova-parlamentul-european-1741909>. Accesat la 10 octombrie 2023.
- CRJM. „Reprezentanți ai societății civile din Republica Moldova, Ucraina și Georgia au transmis oficialilor europeni cereri de aderare la UE.” 21 mai 2015. <https://old.crjm.org/reprezentanti-ong-din-moldova-ucraina-si-georgia-cer-aderarea-la-ue/>. Accesat la 18 decembrie 2023.
- Horia C. Matei, Silviu Neguț, și Ion Nicolae. *Enciclopedia Statelor Lumii*. București: Editura Meronia, 2016.

- Ministerul Afacerilor Externe și Integrării Europene. „Energie.” Accesat la 17 octombrie 2023. <https://mfa.gov.md/ro/content/energie>.
- Parlamentul Republicii Moldova. „Situația din Republica Moldova, prezentată la Reuniunea de toamnă a AP OSCE de deputatul Igor Chiriac.” 26 noiembrie 2022. <https://multimedia.parlament.md/situatia-din-republica-moldova-prezentata-la-reuniunea-de-toamna-a-adunarii-parlamentare-a-osce-de-catre-deputatul-igor-chiriac/>. Accesat la 18 decembrie 2023.
- Reniță, A. „Pericolul de la Cobasna: În caz de deflagrație, puterea exploziei ar putea echivala cu cea a unei bombe atomice aruncată pe Hiroșima.” *Timpul*, 18 august 2020. <https://unimedia.info/ro/news/c310d0072e2328e4/pericolul-de-la-cobasna-in-caz-de-deflagratie-puterea-exploziei-ar-putea-echivala-cu-cea-a-unei-bombe-atomice-aruncata-in-hirosima.html>. Accesat la 12 octombrie 2023.
- Sartori, P. „La Transnistria chiave del Caucazo.” *La Russia in casa*, nr. 6, 2006. <https://www.limesonline.com/sommari-rivista/la-russia-in-casa>. Accesat la 18 decembrie 2023.